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To
GEORGE RAVENSCROFT DENNIS

TO WHOSE UNGRUDGING AID AND SCHOLARLY JUDGMENT
IS LARGELY DUE SUCH VALUE AS THERE MAY BE
IN THIS ATTEMPT TO GIVE WIDER CURRENCY
TO THE THOUGHTS AND WORDS OF A
MASTER OF LITERATURE WHOM
WE BOTH ADMIRE



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INTRODUCTION

IN an age of journalism there ought to be no lack of interest in a man of genius whose work was all done for the periodical press. Thomas de Quincey was a great writer of whom it is very nearly true to say that he never wrote a book.¹ His works are a library in themselves, a vast miscellany that fills twelve, fourteen, twenty-two volumes in English and American collected editions; but all this mighty store of wit, wisdom, imagination, humour, and diverse learning, had been garnered in by De Quincey and his editors from the harvest fields and dried stubble-lands of the magazines, reviews, journals, and cyclopædias of the nineteenth century. In a sense therefore he is a great journalist, though he can but rarely have entered a newspaper office, and his practical experience of the craft was limited to a brief and unsuccessful adventure as the editor of a small provincial *Gazette*. But the true description of him is that which M. Maxime du Camp applies to Théophile Gauthier: he was a "polygrapher," a man of letters who wrote about all sorts of subjects as they came to hand or as his own fancy and the public taste dictated them. Mr. Andrew Lang says that our ancestors compendiously described such persons as hacks; modern politeness prefers to label them "miscellaneous writers." The description, at any rate, covers some famous names. Swift, Johnson, Smollett, Southey, Coleridge, Jean Paul, Lessing, Landor, Gauthier, were all polygraphers, who instead of devoting themselves to

¹ It is not quite true; because the tale called *Klosterheim* (1832) and *The Logic of Political Economy* (1844) were both published in the first instance in book form.

a "special subject," or to one definite and distinct line of creative production, made divagations through many highways and by-ways of literature, and did not often follow any route to the journey's end.

The polygrapher is sometimes born and oftener made. Most commonly he is driven to the business, as Johnson, and Southey, and Gauthier were, by the urgent necessity of bringing his talents to the market. A man of letters, unless the imaginative impulse is supreme within him, and sometimes when it is, must live by producing in sufficient quantity such wares as the readers and the dealers want. If he is poor, and cannot wait till the world has discovered, and is prepared to reward him for, the exercise of his distinctive talent, or if he has the critical and analytic rather than the creative faculty, he must resort to those who do business in the literary mart, and he may esteem himself lucky if he does not become a day-labourer condemned to "work for bread upon Athenian stalls." In the eighteenth century he went to the "booksellers"; in our day he goes to the newspapers; in the earlier half of the nineteenth century he wrote for the magazines.

De Quincey's active life synchronized with the period when the English and Scottish literary periodicals were at the apogee of their influence and success. They supplied the public with a great deal both of its "serious," and its lighter, reading; they were powerful, wealthy, and important, and their circulation was, for their time, large; they were conducted by enterprising publishers or keen men of business who, in their ardent rivalry with one another, were eager to draw the ablest pens of Britain into their service. A monthly or quarterly press which had among its contributors such writers as Coleridge, Keats, Landor, Sir William Hamilton, Christopher North, Lockhart, Hood, Lamb, Hazlitt, Jeffrey, John Stuart Mill, Carlyle, and Macaulay, had some reason to think well of itself.

And it appealed to a body of readers which, numerous as it was, still expected, or at any rate was prepared to accept, articles and essays written with a certain regard

to literary form and a certain appeal to literary tradition. The day of the real "popular" magazine, which was to go down in its hundreds of thousands to a public that could only just read and write, was yet to come. It was still worth while to pay critics and historians to write on Herodotus and Plato and the philosophy of Kant. But there was no pedantic stiffness about this periodical journalism, which often struck the "personal note" with a freedom denied to its successors, and was already alive to the fact that it was much safer to shock readers than to bore them. The serious magazines of the 'thirties and 'forties were sometimes quite startling in their vivacity.

It was into this eddying stream that De Quincey poured himself for his literary life of nearly six-and-thirty years which followed upon another six-and-thirty years of dreams and drugs and omnivorous ill-assorted reading. When the time came for him to commence author, which he did about the age at which Byron died, he was equipped, if any man was, to be a polyhistor. Since his earliest childhood, if De Quincey was ever a child or ever ceased to be one, his life had been mostly spent with books when it had not been spent in solitary musing. At six he was beginning to philosophize, at thirteen he was a scholar and a metaphysician, at fifteen he was lecturing a married lady eleven years his senior on theology and Greek. He read widely, discursively, heroically: he was versed not only in the poets, the historians, the philosophers, of the chief ancient and modern literatures, but also in more abstruse and less known authors. Like Coleridge he had ploughed a way where, as he said, few or none would follow, through the dense underwoods, the tangled coppices, the *selva selvaggia* of mediaeval scholastic theology and modern German metaphysics. He had Kant and Hegel at his fingers' ends, as well as Goethe and Richter, and Homer and Aristotle, and Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne. And his memory, if loose and shifty, was prodigious; it betrayed him into many misquotations and inaccuracies, but it enabled him to put together, with a scanty provision of reference-books and systematic notes, essays

teeming with literary and historical references which no other person could have written without a library at his elbow. Nor was he a mere devourer of printed matter. He had thought much, analyzed, reflected, synthesized, always it is true in an irregular, desultory fashion, but always with logical clearness and a determined independence and originality. Eccentric little recluse though he was, he had not cut himself adrift from the living world or forgotten that life in itself was more interesting than any of the things written about it. Add to this that his style was unworn and unhackneyed when he first accosted the world with it; and it was such a style as no other Englishman of his age, or almost of any age, could write, a style as splendid and powerful as it was lucid and intelligible.

—So gifted and so limited, he burst upon the periodical world of Britain in 1821 with the *Confessions of an English Opium-eater*, and at once became famous. But his fame only led him further into the periodical mesh, from which he never shook his limbs free. Everything he wrote thereafter (with the unimportant exceptions noted) was cut to the magazine scale, and framed more or less on the magazine pattern. His longer pieces are fragments jointed together after their primary publication, or portions of a larger whole usually left unfinished. His capricious, irregular industry, his verbal fluency, and overflowing fertility of expression, and the temptation he lay under to fill a few pages of a magazine when the occasion offered or a taking title presented itself, combined to make his *Collected Works* a vast and ill-assorted miscellany. Splendid flights of imaginative description, torsos of impassioned rhetoric that will live as long as the language in which they are written, passages of acute criticism, subtle analysis, and haunting pathos, are wedged in among blocks of wandering talk and discursive discussion.

✓ To read De Quincey through from beginning to end is not a profitable exercise, nor I think will many people undertake the task. Much that he wrote was hardly worth reproducing, and his editors have done him small

service by ransacking its forgotten receptacles. In one of the most amusing of his sketches he relates how he kept his manuscripts in a huge bath where they accumulated in unplumbed confusion. When he was suddenly called upon for an essay, he fished among these depths, and if he did not find what he sought he hooked up something else—it might be only a blank sheet of paper with the heading of a projected article. His mind was a repository of chaotic erudition and bubbling ideas, into which he dived when he set about to write for a magazine. He might tap a vein of special knowledge and original thought on the subject of his search, but there was quite likely to be a good deal of loose dross clinging to the ore.

Whatever it was, De Quincey was too often inclined to let it all go in. For he had the journalistic vice, he lay under the painful journalistic necessity, of making copy; and as the editors would always print a contribution from the "English Opium-eater," whatever its character, De Quincey gave them and their public plenty of padding. He is desultory, discursive, and diffuse beyond most writers, though all these blemishes fade away when he rises to the dignity, the clarity, the pulsating eloquence, of his better passages. For this reason there are few authors who have less to lose and more to gain by being read in Selections. The best of him can be presented in comparatively small compass; and though it is true that from this volume much is omitted that might be interesting (for De Quincey, even when weakest and most trivial, is seldom uninteresting), much also is dispensed with that served a passing purpose, and can now be advantageously left unread by such as would taste the true quality of a most original, acute, and penetrating intelligence, and a great master of English writing; who in the ornate magnificence of his style has had no rival, save one, since the prose-poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹

¹ Tennyson said that the six authors in whom the most eloquent English prose was to be found were Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Ruskin, and De Quincey.

Much moonshine has been shed over De Quincey's life. He became a literary legend long before he passed away, and has so remained for many people who perhaps know very little of his writing at first-hand. For this he was himself primarily responsible. When a man first comes before the world as a professed opium-eater, in a mood of the most prodigal self-revelation, he cannot be surprised or annoyed if the world considers him a strange creature. De Quincey was neither surprised nor annoyed. Modest, reserved, and solitary in his personal habits, in print he was absolutely without reticence. He gave himself away, and sometimes gave away his friends, with unqualified freedom, and satisfied to the full the taste of an age which still felt the impulse of Rousseau, Goethe, Chateaubriand, and Byron, and enjoyed undraped autobiographical exhibitions. It liked the literary man to strip himself to the soul and lecture scientifically, sentimentally, or sensationally on himself.

De Quincey recognized this element in the public taste, and upon it he played deliberately. He perceived that his opium-eating was a first-rate literary asset and he made the most of it. As long as he lived he was the English Opium-eater; it was the pseudonym with which he often signed his essays, even when they dealt with subjects which had no connection with opium. In the earlier part of the last century there was a good deal of mystery about the uses and properties of this drug, a sort of Oriental glamour and dark fascination, which made people regard "opium-eating" with a shivering fascination. All this De Quincey quite understood, and he made tremendous copy out of his dealings with the mighty stimulant, dwelling on its pains and pleasures, exaggerating his own servitude to the morbid habit and the intensity of his wrestle for emancipation, and artistically heightening the lights and shadows of the psychological romance of which he was the hero and subject.

The stories that got wind about his personal eccentricities, and some of his later essays and reminiscences, steeped in delightful egotism and attractive indiscretions, added force to the general impression. The *Con-*

fessions, to a hasty reader, convey the idea that the writer had passed through a long course of chequered, and at times depraved, experience; many I daresay have figured him as a kind of Richard Savage or Thomas Otway, a man of genius sunk for years in the depths of misery and degradation. They omit to notice that De Quincey's struggle with loneliness and poverty in London lasted only a few months; that he was a boy of seventeen at the time who had run away from school; and that he had a very comfortable home to which he was free to return, and in fact did so, as soon as he was tired of his escapade. Long afterwards De Quincey passed some years in serious pecuniary embarrassment; but during the greater part of his life he was in possession of a moderate income, and of such distress and conflict as fell to the lot of many literary men (Samuel Johnson, for instance, or that later imitator and disciple of his own, B. V. Thomson), he knew nothing.

His life, indeed, looked at objectively, was singularly uneventful. The storm of psychical and intellectual experience, described in so many eloquent pages, raged against a grey and placid background. Few external incidents, in any respect interesting or remarkable, can be recovered by De Quincey's biographers. That wider world which lies beyond the seas of Britain he had never seen; of his own country he had seen comparatively little. He knew London, and Manchester, and Oxford, the hills and valleys of the Lake country, the streets and suburbs of Edinburgh; in boyhood he had wandered for a few weeks in Wales and had visited the west of Ireland. The modern man of letters who must needs refresh a jaded brain at frequent intervals with journeys to Sicily or Spain, to America, Eastern Asia, or Northern Africa, who fears to lose touch with the world if he withdraws too long from the whirl and tumult of great capitals, may marvel where De Quincey found the materials for so many volumes. They were drawn from his books, and from his own unquiet mind and restless, searching soul.

His adventures were those of the spirit and the intellect;

the lamp of Romance was alight in heart and brain, but it threw scarcely a fitful gleam upon him from without. It is to be feared that no industrious investigator will find in his career material to gratify the prevailing taste for literary love-stories. De Quincey's love-story was only "romantic" as that of millions of unimportant wedded couples everywhere is romantic. To the good woman he married he was an affectionate husband; and if shadowy forms of other women who exercised a faint passing influence upon him appear in his *Reminiscences* he contrived, it is clear, to get through life on a limited allowance of that passionate association with the other sex sometimes deemed essential to the development of the artistic temperament.

And so it was in other ways. He was a man to whom not many things happened. He could hardly ever have encountered any greater danger than that of losing himself in one of his midnight walks; he had seldom to grapple with foes more formidable than illiberal publishers or vociferating landladies; his most serious practical enterprise was to enter new lodgings or to take the lease of a new house; the worst of his anxieties was a pecuniary embarrassment, which however did not, except for brief intervals, involve him in real want. Clear away the legend and the opium mist, and behind there is revealed the existence of a quiet and reserved student, the picture of a life passed in solitary labour, in modest comfort, in the enjoyment of the domestic affections. Opium did not prevent De Quincey, like Coleridge, from doing his work, paying his debts, and attending to his family.

He belonged, by origin, to that wealthy mercantile class which was growing opulent and powerful in the later eighteenth century. His father wrote his name Quincey; the son revived or invented the prefix *De*, being of the opinion that the family had "come over with the Conqueror." Thomas Quincey was a Manchester merchant who made money in the West India trade, wrote *A Tour in the Midland Counties* (1775), and mar-

ried a Miss Penson, "a lady of good family connections," with brothers in the service of the Honourable East India Company. Eight children the couple had, of whom Thomas De Quincey was the fifth. He was born in Manchester on 15th August 1785; during his early childhood his father removed to a house at Greenhay, then in a rustic neighbourhood a mile outside the town. It was a pleasant suburban mansion, with its gardens and lawns, and the family lived there in some style. The father was mostly away travelling on his business in Portugal, America, and the West Indies. Household affairs were managed by his wife, a lady of a somewhat masterful disposition, seriously addicted to Hannah More and the evangelical religion, who never quite "took to" her gifted second son. Of the first years of his life in the Manchester home, De Quincey has given an account in the earlier chapters of his *Autobiographic Sketches*.

It is an amazing record, amazing when it is remembered that it is written by a man of forty-three looking back on his recollections of life as a child of seven or ten, amazing in its revelation of emotional and intellectual precocity. We must allow much for De Quincey's literary embroidery. It is impossible to believe that a boy scarcely out of the nursery could have been so mature in some respects, so childish in others, as the youthful scholar and philosopher of these delightful pages. There is an artistic finish in the details which seems to betray the after-thoughts of the practised executant, engaged in creation rather than in reminiscence. Thus we are told that Thomas and his tyrannical elder brother William played for months together at the game of pretending to be the sovereigns of imaginary realms. Master William's haughty and aggressive empire was called Tigrosylvania; the younger brother was the ruler of a squalid little kingdom, inhabited by a race of semi-savages, exposed to constant invasion, which was known as Gombroon. The names are magnificent. What composer of a political romance could have invented better ones than Tigrosylvania and Gombroon? But could boys of seven and twelve have invented them? It is true they were not

ordinary boys. William, the Tigrosylvanian conqueror, informed his brother of Gombroom that he had ascertained from the works of Lord Monboddo that certain low specimens of humanity were still provided with tails, and that this was the unhappy condition of the degraded Gombroonians: whose sovereign was advised to issue an edict requiring his subjects to sit down for at least six hours daily, which, said the Emperor William, a Lamarckian born out of season, though it could not do much might at least do something towards reducing the superfluous appendage.

These suggestions caused great grief to the King of Gombroom, who in those years, and long afterwards, was easily grieved. The picture he draws of himself is that of a weakly child, small in stature, brooding, shy, and sensitive, with an intense emotional capacity, and an irrepressibly alert intelligence. The pathos and mystery of Death were first brought home to him at six years of age when his elder sister Elizabeth died. The episode is the subject of an exquisite passage in the Autobiography. No one who has once read it will forget the picture of the child stealing into the chamber where the dead girl lay, or lose the cadence of the sentences that tell how a wind, "the saddest that ever mortal heard," such a wind as "might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries," swelled through the open window, and it seemed to the boy as if a shaft of sunlight ran up to the vault of the far blue sky. A little later he had another experience of "the almighty pomp in which this great idea of Death apparelled itself" when his father one summer evening came home from the West Indies to die of consumption in his thirty-ninth year.

The family was well provided for with an income of £1,600 a year, and the event did not much disturb the even current of life at Greenhay. The peace of mind, however, of young Thomas de Quincey was considerably shaken by the conduct of his elder brother, Master William, the Emperor of Tigrosylvania aforementioned, who made a fag, serf, and much overburdened retainer of his junior, involving him in constant Homeric en-

counters with the boys of the neighbouring cotton factories whom they met on their way to school in Manchester. In spite of these distractions, the boy read much and thought more, and at eleven he was already something of a philosopher, a good deal of a moralist, an anxious literary critic, and a very close and interested observer of every manifestation of life which came before him. In 1796, Mrs. Quincey sold the house at Greenhay and went to live at Bath. Thomas was sent to the Grammar School at that town, where he spent two years, and astonished the masters by his rapid progress in the classical languages, and his skill in Latin verse. After that he had a year at a private school in Wiltshire, and then he went on a long visit to an aristocratic young friend in Ireland.

The friend was Lord Westport, son of the third Earl of Altamont. He was an Eton boy rather younger than De Quincey, whose acquaintance he had made during a holiday visit to Bath with his tutor. Master Thomas travelled with his host to Holyhead and Dublin, and stayed with him for several weeks at Lord Altamont's mansion at Connemara. Here he enjoyed himself very much and had many interesting experiences. Ladies took kindly to the clever boy of fifteen, with his minute frame, his delicate handsome face, and his premature wisdom. On the canal boat from Dublin he met the Countess of Errol and her sister, Miss Blake, a beautiful girl, who first brought before the young gentleman "the pure and powerful ideal of womanhood and womanly excellence." From that day, he says, he was "an altered creature," a child no more. However, he is careful to tell us that he did not fall in love with this lady, or with any other woman, being obsessed with the "demoniac fascination" of solving philosophic problems beyond the strength of all human beings. Notwithstanding this formidable preoccupation he was clearly, at this time and for years afterwards a very likeable, vivacious youngster, fond of company, and not too sage to be above amusing himself. His melancholy, of which he makes a good deal, was at this period rather of the Byronic or Wertherian

kind. He brooded when in solitude, and had already an excessive sense of the sadness and sorrow of life. But in the company of others he could always revive—as many people of the hypochondriac temperament will—and was a conversationalist of unflinching animation and resourcefulness.

In these days of opening manhood he had plenty of gaiety and easily made friends. After the Irish trip he went on another country-house visit at Laxton, the seat of Lord and Lady Carbery, in Northamptonshire. Lady Carbery, a friend of his mother, a woman of six-and-twenty, with pretensions both to beauty and brains, made much of the young "Admirable Crichton," as she called him. She happened at the time to be in trouble about her soul, and felt that her doubts could only be resolved by a knowledge of the text of the Greek Testament. De Quincey very readily undertook the task of coaching the young matron, and no doubt pleasant mornings were spent over lexicons and grammars by teacher and pupil. In return Lady Carbery made her preceptor comfortable, and had him taught riding by a competent groom, and shooting by one of the keepers who, says De Quincey, "regarded me probably as an object of mysterious curiosity rather than of sublunary hope."

After these divagations it must have been a shock to the youthful philosopher and man of the world to be reduced once more to the status of a schoolboy. However, his mother and guardians decided that he should now be sent to Manchester Grammar School, to which place of education De Quincey went with exceeding reluctance. At the school he was unhappy and discontented and in bad health. The Manchester air was infected by the smoke of "diabolical factories"; exercise was no part of the school plan, so that in winter it was impossible even to get an hour's walk a day, a severe deprivation to De Quincey who, if no sportsman, was always a walker; and by an arrangement which would seem criminal in these days the dinner-hour was so curtailed that the boys had to bolt their food in haste.

"I have barely time to push it down and as to chewing it that is out of the question." Gastric troubles ensued and tormented their victim for the rest of his life. Athletics and school hygiene were not considered in the educational systems of 1801. Moreover, the boy took little interest in his companions, or in such society as he could get in a city entirely given up to trade and manufactures. He could not stir out of doors without being "nosed by a factory, a cotton-bog, a cotton-dealer, or something else allied to that most detestable commerce." Worst of all, the head master could teach him nothing, being a pompous and ignorant pedant whose pupils laughed at his clumsy scholarship.

In spite of his urgent appeals De Quincey's mother and guardians declined to remove him from the school. He resolved to remove himself. He borrowed £10 from his friend Lady Carbery, and quietly slipped out of his boarding-house in the early hours of a summer morning, being not then quite seventeen. He walked to Chester where his mother was living, having with her at the time her brother, Colonel Penson, home from India on furlough. The Bengal officer took a more indulgent view of the lad's escapade than the lady, and the young truant was allowed to set out on a sort of walking tour in Wales. With an allowance of a guinea a week he wandered about the Welsh valleys during the autumn, lodging in farmhouses or village inns, carrying a portable tent and sleeping on the hillsides, suffering some privations, but on the whole enjoying himself a good deal. Before long he dropped all correspondence with his guardians, thus deliberately cutting off supplies, and naturally found himself reduced to poverty. So he decided to migrate to London, hoping to raise some £200 from the money-lenders on his expectations, and with this sum to support himself in the capital during the four remaining years of his minority.

This London adventure belongs to literature, for it forms the main theme of the first portion of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. It lasted only some seven months, from the late autumn of 1802 to the

spring or early summer of 1803. They were months teeming with experience for the impressionable, sensitive, super-intellectualized lad, fresh from the school-room, and the mountain-villages of Wales. In London he was a penniless outcast. He hung about the office of a low-class money-lending attorney, vainly trying to negotiate a loan, slept and starved in a half-empty house in Soho with a pauper child for his companion, and roamed about the streets, making friends with the "pariah women," who haunted the "endless terraces" of Oxford Street. It is all set down in the *Confessions*, with that magic of imaginative presentation which De Quincey knew how to throw about the common things of life when they concerned himself. If that faculty is poetry, then assuredly was he a poet of no mean rank. Nothing that he had ever seen or felt or read was to him trivial or commonplace, unfit to be described in elaborate detail, or incapable of being lifted into an atmosphere vibrating with emotion, glowing with rhetoric, and made musical with the chords of pathos.

Many other educated and well-nurtured youths must have found themselves stranded for a few months in a great city, not knowing where to turn for money or even for food and shelter. With most men the brief episode would soon be submerged amid the other interests of active life; in after years it would be no more than a blurred reminiscence, dimly recalled with a smile or a sigh. For De Quincey it was an experience that bit into the fibres of his being, and left ineffaceable impressions. Twenty years later his tenacious brain could bring back the minutest incidents of those sorrow-laden, thought-laden weeks, and exhibit them as living pictures with flashing lights and moving forms. It is the quality which distinguishes the vague generalizing memory of the average man from that clean-cutting creative organ of the literary artist, which picks out the ordinary things as they pass, and makes them wonderful and strange. Swift, we know, could write beautifully about a broomstick; Mr. Chesterton, we are given to understand, finds mystery and romance in a lamp-post.

De Quincey could have made a philosophy of broomsticks, and shown, with a wealth of discursive erudition and pungent argument, that in a lamp-post there are thoughts that may often lie too deep for tears.

His attempts to raise a loan in London were fruitless. Nor was he more successful in endeavouring to borrow from a young nobleman of his acquaintance at Eton. Being at the end of his resources and, no doubt, tired of starvation, he returned some time in the earlier part of 1803 to his mother's house. It was obviously out of the question to send him back to school; his guardians wished him to prepare for some regular work in life, though the youth himself had already decided that his chief interest must always lie in literature and meditation. In December he went up to Oxford and matriculated at Worcester College. He would have preferred Christ Church; but Worcester had the reputation of being a cheap college, and De Quincey, on the inadequate allowance of £100 a year made to him by his guardians, was forced to be economical.

For this, among other reasons, he did not take very kindly to Oxford nor Oxford to him. Like Gibbon and Shelley and some other men of genius, he acknowledged small obligations to his university, passed through it without distinction, and left it without regret. The beauty of Oxford should have appealed to him, and its famous tradition could hardly fail to touch his vivid historic sense. An essay written in after years shows that he kept a penetrating and observant eye on the social, educational, and financial aspects of the place. But, during his college years he was solitary, unhappy, and unknown. For this "child who had been in hell"¹ it was, no doubt, as hard to find congenial companions among the Worcester "men" as it had been among the schoolboys of Manchester. He took no part in the sports or amusements of the university, and made no particular impression either on his contemporaries or the college authorities. With his tutor, he says, he

¹ See *infra*, p. xxxix.

never exchanged more than three sentences. The Provost of Worcester had discernment enough to perceive that he was a remarkable young man; and he could no doubt have taken high honours if he had chosen to work in the academic groove. As a fact he took no honours at all, having for some reason or other absented himself from the *viva voce* part of his final examination.

But at Oxford he was occupied with other interests than those of the Schools, nor was his ambition directed towards a first-class or a fellowship. He found a companion in a German undergraduate who taught him his own language and Hebrew; and he plunged fiercely into German philosophy and metaphysics, into theology, mediæval history, and English literature, subjects which in those days at Oxford did not "pay" in the schools. He was passionately attracted by the revival of English romantic poetry, and already fascinated by Wordsworth and Coleridge. He began a correspondence with the former, and made ineffectual efforts to meet the latter as early as 1804 or 1805. The meeting, postponed for a time by Coleridge's journey to Malta, took place a couple of years later at Bridgewater, when Coleridge, after the first greetings and civilities, "swept at once into a continuous strain of eloquent dissertation."

He was often in London during these Oxford years, and made acquaintance with Charles Lamb and other literary people. Another acquaintance he also formed at this period. His health had been badly shaken by the privations of his first London visit. He suffered much from gastric troubles, neuralgia, and rheumatic pains in the head. A friend recommended opium as a specific. De Quincey turned into the shop of a druggist in Oxford Street—the "immortal druggist" of the *Confessions* "sent down to earth on a special mission to myself"—and found that "happiness might be bought for a penny and carried in the waistcoat pocket." This was in his second year at college, when he was nineteen or twenty.

Two years later he left the university and came to

live in London. His ostensible business was to prepare for the Bar. His real purpose was that of reading almost every thing in the world except law. He had now come into the property left to him under his father's will, and had a sufficient income, though he had already begun to make inroads upon his moderate capital. He had raised money from "the Jews" to supplement his insufficient allowance at college, and if his habits were simple and frugal he was careless in all business matters and extremely generous. A year after he came of age he was in Bristol where he heard from Cottle, the bookseller, that Coleridge was in great distress for want of money and profoundly dejected. De Quincey placed £300 in Cottle's hands to be given to Coleridge from "a young man of fortune who admired his talents." The philosopher, not unaccustomed to receive substantial tributes to his genius, accepted the money without making too particular inquiries as to the name of his benefactor.

De Quincey did other services for Coleridge. In this year, 1807, the great man had decided to quarter his family upon Southey at Keswick; and as he was unable to accompany them himself from Bristol, it was the young Oxonian who acted as their convoy on the journey to the Lakes. The party rested two days at Wordsworth's cottage at Grasmere. Next year De Quincey was again at Grasmere helping Wordsworth with his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra. And in the autumn of 1809, at Dorothy Wordsworth's suggestion, he cut himself loose from London, and installed himself and his books in the little cottage at Townend, Grasmere, in which Wordsworth himself had lived till he had quitted it for Allan Bank, a mile or so distant. "Cottage immortal in my remembrance," he says, "as well it might be, for this cottage I retained through just seven-and-twenty years: this was the scene of struggles the most tempestuous and bitter within my own mind: this the scene of my despondency and unhappiness: this the scene of my happiness—a happiness which justified the faith of man's earthly lot as upon the whole a dowry from heaven!"

He settled down very comfortably and contentedly as a "Laker," a title he was proud to claim though perhaps he was never recognized by the austere and exclusive members of the school as one of their inner circle. He roamed about the hills, made friends with the dalesmen and their children, and enjoyed the society of the Wordsworths, his near neighbours, of Southey at Keswick, Charles Lloyd at Brathay, and, above all, of John Wilson, the "Christopher North" of *Blackwood*, who had recently come to live at Elleray on Windermere. Wilson and De Quincey had been contemporaries at Oxford; but the recluse of Worcester had never met, or apparently even heard of, the brilliant gentleman-commoner of Magdalen, who was the leader of undergraduate society, with a great reputation as athlete, scholar, wit, and conversationalist. In the Lakes the shy little philosopher and the handsome yellow-haired giant became close friends. They spent hours together in interminable discussion and heroic mountain rambles; and though De Quincey, as Professor Masson says, was "one of the smallest and feeblest-looking of mortals, hardly more than five feet high, while Wilson was one of the most magnificent young athletes that ever attracted men's or women's eyes in street or on the heather," they were equally matched both as walkers and talkers. De Quincey's pedestrian ability lasted longer than that of his friend, and he was still plodding through the Midlothian lanes when Christopher North was in his grave.

With all these enjoyments, social and other, with his library of books overflowing the narrow rooms of the tiny white-walled cottage, and with opium, not yet a merciless tyrant but only a stimulus to thought and an aid to tranquil meditation, De Quincey passed some pleasant and fruitful years; fruitful not in actual literary production, for he wrote nothing, but in enlarging the enormous range of his miscellaneous erudition. In particular he studied the German philosophy, and saturated himself in the writings of the Transcendentalists. In 1814 Wilson induced him to pay a visit to Edinburgh,

where he stayed for some weeks, and made his own mark in the notable group of which Christopher North was an honoured member. Men like Sir William Hamilton and Lockhart recognized that there was something out of the common in this omnivorous reader and accomplished talker, whose musical cadences wandered, as one of them said, from beeves to butterflies, and thence to metaphysics and the soul's immortality, to Plato and Kant, to Milton's early years and Shakespeare's Sonnets, to Homer and Aeschylus, or to St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Chrysostom, and St. Basil. He had gained a reputation in Edinburgh long before he came eventually to settle there.

In 1816 De Quincey married. His bride was Margaret Simpson, the daughter of a Westmorland farmer, a beautiful and good woman, who bore her part bravely in the troubled years that were presently to come. To her De Quincey was deeply attached. He speaks of the period immediately following his marriage as "those heavenly years through which I lived, beloved, *with thee, to thee, for thee, by thee.*" The domestic sentiment, the family affections meant a great deal to him, as any one can see from the earlier chapters of his Autobiographic sketches. To children he was always devoted; the death of Wordsworth's little daughter Kate plunged him into a passion of sorrow so violent that we might regard his own references to it as sheer exaggeration if we had not other evidence of the intensity with which the chords of emotion vibrated in him. He was the last person to make light of parental and marital responsibilities; and though his eccentric habits must have sometimes made him "gey ill to live wi'," he was the most kindly and affectionate of fathers to the five sons and three daughters who were the offspring of his marriage.

Margaret Simpson's wedded life was not smooth or easy. De Quincey had been taking opium through the nine years of his Grasmere residence, at first, as he declares, with no other result than a general exaltation of his mental faculties. But after the pleasures of the drug came the pains and penalties terrifically described

in the *Confessions*. He had been steadily increasing the dose, until at length he tells us he could take 320 grains of opium in the form of eight thousand drops of laudanum a day. Then, according to his own account, he fell into a degrading servitude to this indulgence which he knew to be destructive to mind and body. His nights were made dreadful by the fearful dreams that clustered about his pillow and threatened him with madness. His days were passed in torpor and brooding gloom. He was incapable of intellectual labour or sustained exertion of any kind. He could not even read, at least so he says, though I do not believe him. The image of a De Quincey who for nearly two years "read nothing" is to me inconceivable.

But he had lost all power of systematic thought and regular study. His long-cherished idea of a great philosophical treatise to which he had proposed to give the title of an unfinished work of Spinoza's, *De Emendatione Humani Intellectus*, was now finally abandoned. In a "momentary flash" of intellectual vigour he read Ricardo, and was so far revived by that suggestive thinker that he drew up a proposal for a volume of his own on Economics. But with the printers waiting for copy and the book already advertised De Quincey's energy flickered out. The *Prolegomena to all Future Systems of Political Economics* reposed beside its elder and more dignified brother. Under the "Circean spell" of the drug the will was paralyzed just as the intellect was dormant; the opium-slave could not rouse himself to perform the ordinary duties of life, he could hardly bring himself to write a letter, he was a prey to indecision, procrastination, intolerable remorse.

How far De Quincey did really sink to the depths must always be an open question. We have to take his word for it that he passed through this black valley of degradation and suffering from which the outlet seemed likely to be melancholia or dementia. My own strong belief, though I can adduce no evidence to support it, since we really know nothing of the whole matter beyond what De Quincey has chosen to tell us, is that the col-

lapse was by no means so complete as it appears in the pages of the *Confessions*. He wanted to make his story as effective and melodramatic as possible, and he naturally heightened and darkened the picture. The book was an autobiographical romance, and its author was quite entitled to treat the facts of his life with artistic freedom. Besides, it was impossible for him to handle the most ordinary incident or experience that concerned himself without making his canvas burn with vivid and startling colour. That was the characteristic of his genius, the manner in which his creative power projected itself. His consciousness was abnormally intense, his self-consciousness sensitive to every touch, and both faculties focussed their rays upon literary expression. A man who could draw dreams and dramas and seas of emotion out of a walk down the street or a drive on a coach could hardly be expected to restrain his brush-work upon so tempting a subject as that of the philosopher lying bound and helpless under the spell of the Eastern enchantment.

At any rate De Quincey's opium-paralysis did not, in its severer form, last very long. He married, as we have seen, in 1816, and for some time afterwards, probably till the middle of the next year, he says that he lived in tranquil happiness and was at the height of his mental and bodily activity. The stage of prostration and extreme dejection appears to have set in during 1817, and it persisted through the following year. Its victim was roused from his torpor by the rough shock of financial embarrassment. For some time his pecuniary affairs had been falling into disorder. Though honourable and even punctilious in all money matters he was childishly unbusinesslike and imprudently generous, always ready to assist his friends with loans and gifts which his resources did not warrant. The parsimony of his guardians had caused him to anticipate his patrimony in order to supplement his inadequate allowance at Oxford, and no doubt he had to pay heavily for the favours of "the Jews." Then came the failure of a business firm in which a good deal of his capital was invested, and it became

necessary for him to earn money. He could do nothing for which the world was inclined to pay except, it might be, to write. He had been reading and studying and meditating for thirty years; bales of miscellaneous information were warehoused in the dark recesses of his brain; he had already some reputation, through Wilson and other friends, in the *Blackwood* and *Quarterly* circles. He now turned to literature as a profession.

He began with a brief interlude of regular journalism. The Lonsdales and other Tory magnates of the Lake country had started a weekly journal, the *Westmorland Gazette*, in order to counteract "the infamous levelling doctrines of Mr. Brougham" and the Whigs. In the summer of 1819 the editorship was offered to De Quincey at a salary of £160 a year, out of which he paid a sub-editor. It was not a princely appointment; but he accepted it gladly, and went to work, oscillating for some months between Grasmere and Kendal, where the *Gazette* was published. He was not cut out for a successful editor, though he had some good ideas. One of them was to describe and discuss celebrated crimes, a distinctly popular journalistic vein which he subsequently worked in the most brilliant of his satirical essays. But his massive leading articles were above the heads of the Westmorland squires who were probably not impressed by his promise to make their journal famous throughout Great Britain by essays on German literature! The editorship only lasted about eighteen months. In 1820 De Quincey was in Edinburgh prospecting the ground for other literary employment. He concluded, however, that his best chances lay in London.

To the capital therefore he went in 1821 and offered his services to the proprietors of the *London Magazine*, one of the best and most enterprising of the new monthlies. Its staff of contributors included Hazlitt, Thomas Hood, Allan Cunningham, and Lamb, and it had been enriched by verses from the hand of Keats. It was in the number for September 1821 that there appeared anonymously the first instalment of *The Confessions of an English Opium-eater; being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*.

A second instalment was published in the following month. The papers were instantaneously and enormously successful. The striking originality of the whole scheme, the daring frankness of the self-revelation, the fascination that clung about the mysterious drug, the vigour and brilliancy of the style, the pathos and wit of some of the pages, and the splendid rhetoric of others, were irresistible. The public were attracted, dazzled, horrified, but at any rate profoundly interested both in the strange tale and its unknown author.

He did not remain unknown for long. Publishers and editors soon found out that the opium-eater was the little scholar of the Lakes, a man of whom there had already been some talk in literary circles. The *London Magazine* made a great hit with its new contributor, and its readers clamoured for more of him. De Quincey had the world of the periodicals at his feet, and if he could have satisfied its demands he might have acquired wealth as well as fame. The publishers of the *London* brought out the *Confessions*, in their original unextended form, as a small volume, still without the author's name, in 1822. De Quincey, if he had possessed the business instinct which is not always withheld from the literary temperament, would have taken his fortune at the flood, and followed the book rapidly with others more or less in the same manner, and so established himself as an author with a selling value. But he was not yet ready—he never was ready—for a sustained flight, a long and systematic piece of original composition. The public were waiting for books from the "Opium-eater"; he could give them only magazine essays. These he proceeded to turn out with fair rapidity considering the stiffening of solid learning and analytic thought he worked into most of them. He wrote the *Letters to a Young Man whose Education had been Neglected*, and began to reveal the results of his long solitary voyagings on "the German Ocean of literature" in articles on Kant, Herder, Jean Paul, Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*, and so on; he translated a long and dull German novel; he wrote on Malthus, on the Rosicru-

cians and Freemasons, and other themes. Charles Knight started his new Magazine in 1823 and promptly enlisted this brilliant recruit; Lockhart in 1825 taking over the editorship of the *Quarterly* made advances to him; and in 1826, with an article on Lessing's *Laocoon*, he began an association with *Blackwood* which was maintained until his literary life was drawing towards its end.

In these years, then, when he was between thirty-six and forty-one, De Quincey had "found himself." He had learnt that he could do something; he had qualities that could turn the twitching restless ear of that great incurious animal, the public, in his direction; he had discovered that he could draw from a heaped store of emotional and intellectual miscellanea commodities that would sell. But these five or six years of his first literary adventures were not happy or prosperous. He had left his wife and family at Grasmere, and was for the most part living gloomily in London lodgings, very disconsolate, and drifting back to laudanum. In his new celebrity he might have become a personage in literary and general society; but he was solitary and brooding, and saw little company, except that of the Lambs, whose kindness to him at this period he repaid afterwards in a beautiful tribute to "Saint Charles" and his sister.

His solitude and depression were partly due to poverty. Though he was now, in a sense, a popular author he was not making money. It does not seem to have occurred to him that the "Opium-eater" was entitled to something more than the limited remuneration paid for magazine padding. He appears to have received no more for essays which bore witness to weeks of hard work and the study of years than was given to other men for quite inconspicuous reviews and hastily written articles on topics of the day. He was pouring out his eloquence, his humour, his masterly criticism, his "impassioned prose," his intrusive but attractive personal sketches, at a guinea a page. His income from his pen could hardly have amounted to more than £150 or £200 a year. Meanwhile he was spending money in London lodgings and he had to maintain the establishment at

Grasmere. He was in debt and miserable. "I am quite free from opium," he writes to Wilson little more than three years after the publication of the *Confessions*, "but it has left the liver, the Achilles' heel of almost every human fabric, subject to affections which are tremendous for the weight of wretchedness attached to them. To fence with these with the one hand, and with the other to maintain the war with the wretched business of hack-author, with all its horrible degradations, is more than I am able to bear. . . . With a good publisher and leisure to premeditate what I write, I might yet liberate myself." So is Pegasus bound to the dung-cart! A man of genius toiling in the galley, with some shrewish editor or loud-lunged advertising publisher as boatswain to call the stroke! It is not an uncommon spectacle even in these days.

But would De Quincey ever have liberated himself even with means and leisure? One may doubt it. If he had found time to premeditate what he wrote, would he have written at all? I think he would have ended as he began by merely "premeditating." After his death, Dr. Japp, in looking through his papers found scattered notes marked "for my History of England"; "for my book on the Infinite"; "for my book on the relations of Christianity to man"; and so forth. But the great books did not get beyond notes and memoranda. De Quincey never could write a great book, or at least a big one. To compose by fits and starts, in splendid fragments, and under the pressure of necessity, was the condition under which alone, as it seems, he could express himself. A hack-author, the most richly endowed mercenary in all that age-long army of martyrs, his temperament and his history had decreed that Thomas De Quincey should be. He did something to ennoble the painful craft. "Even in a palace life may be well led." With a great heart, a fine intellect, life may be well led—even in Grub Street.

London was at any rate a harsh nurse to De Quincey. His thoughts were turning to Wilson and to his kindly admirers at Edinburgh. He was there and at Grasmere

on several occasions from 1827 to 1829. He met Carlyle, who said Carlylese things about him later, and bit him into one unforgettable scrap of etching, but nevertheless wrote, as he could write, strong and tender words of comfort for this troubled struggling soul. "Believe it you are well loved here, and none feels better than I what a spirit is for the present eclipsed in clouds. For the present it can only be; time and chance are for all men; this troublous season will end." It ended, or at least was lightened, with De Quincey's removal to Edinburgh, where he settled with his wife and children in 1830, being then forty-five. And in Edinburgh he spent the twenty-nine years of life and work still left him, in Edinburgh or near it he passed the rest of his sedulous days, and in Edinburgh he sleeps in an unregarded grave.

He was in the Northern capital rather than of it. His reputation was established and he might have played a leading part in the society of a city that was still a famous literary centre. But De Quincey's taste for society, literary or other, never very keen, had passed away, and his liking for solitude had grown upon him. He lived a retired, domestic, laborious, oddly irregular kind of life. The irregularities were quite harmless, except in so far as they included a moderate indulgence in drug-taking. His daughters have testified to his affection for his children, his care for their education, his gentle and pathetic solicitude on their account.

His material situation improved; he contributed to *Blackwood* and *Tait's Magazine* and other reviews; and some legacies came in as a convenient supplement to his precarious literary earnings. Though the period of affluence never returned his worst poverty was over, and he was able to live in modest comfort. But as the head of a household he was no more successful than in other relations of practical life. His peculiar habits must have been a trial in any well-ordered family. He could not work except in the midst of a congeries of books and manuscripts which he kept about him in unimaginable confusion, until the flood so rose upon him that at length

he would flee before it in despair, turn the key upon the whole collection, and transfer himself bodily to other quarters.

In 1837 he lost his excellent wife, after two of her sons had preceded her to her grave. The eldest, William, who died in his eighteenth year, was a youth of precocious intellectual development and extraordinary promise, "the crown and glory of my life," his father called him. The daughters had inherited their mother's prudence and quiet strength of character. The eldest, Margaret, a mere girl, took charge both of the helpless genius and her five younger sisters and brothers. They rented a cottage, near Lasswade, seven miles from Edinburgh, a pleasant little house with a garden. This was De Quincey's head-quarters; but he passed most of his time in various lodgings in Edinburgh, moving from one to another under stress of the process described above, so that sometimes he had three or four of these apartments in his simultaneous occupation, with untrustworthy landladies as the custodians of his printed and manuscript treasures. The children grew up, and gradually passed out of his life, all but one daughter, who remained his faithful companion and guardian to the end. One son, an officer in the Cameronians, died in China of fever; another joined the Indian army, with which the family, on the maternal side, had a long-standing connection; and Florence, the second daughter, also became associated with the glory and peril of our Empire in the East, for she married Colonel Baird Smith, the famous chief engineer at the siege of Delhi.

De Quincey meanwhile managed to get through a vast amount of work in his own fashion. To *Blackwood* and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, and afterwards to Hogg's *Weekly Instructor*, he contributed voluminously. For Tait in the early period of his Edinburgh residence he wrote the Autobiographical Sketches and the papers on Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and other men of letters he had known. The series achieved a popularity which was partly a *succès de scandale*. The public was immensely amused at this candid treatment of great

writers still living or recently dead. The essays, those on Coleridge and Wordsworth in particular, are entertaining reading, and it must be said that some of the personal descriptions have the only justification which this kind of gossiping biography can claim; they do help to illustrate the literary development and character of their victims. The personalities are not mere tattle, they possess a certain critical value. But they are unwarrantably intrusive, they make an unfair use, especially in the case of the Wordsworths, of knowledge obtained from private intercourse, and they are often ill-natured. Personally De Quincey was all gentleness, refinement, and shrinking courtesy; but he was not overburdened with delicacy in print, and he made "copy" out of many matters which most people would have preferred to keep to themselves. He wrote about his friends with the same freedom he displayed in writing about himself.

This, no doubt, was due in part to that journalistic instinct which made it difficult for him to resist dealing with a catching subject. But there was sometimes a spice, or more than a spice, of malice in the business. Southey might be excused for saying that De Quincey was a spiteful little creature who deserved to be thrashed. In fact, he bore a grudge against the Lakers, and was not sorry to pay off the score. During his residence at Grasmere the great men had not treated him too well. The austere Wordsworth responded to his ardent devotion with cold reserve; Southey would not take him seriously; Coleridge chose to bestow a disdainful patronage on him, and was jealous of an erudition which invaded his own transcendental and critical preserves. Then it appears that the poets and the philosopher were barely polite to De Quincey's wife, and declined to admit the dalesman's daughter to their highly select tea-tables. De Quincey, who in his earlier, hero-worshipping, Boswellian, phase, had been of real service to Wordsworth, and had treated Coleridge with a generosity for which no acknowledgement was ever made, was wounded by these slights; and pondering over them in his Edinburgh lodgings he retaliated by showing that the great men had

their share of human weaknesses. The satire is not often really offensive; and though there are some passages that ought not to have been written we cannot be sorry that they were. The world would have been poorer without the excursus on Wordsworth's legs, or the picture of Coleridge attended on his walks by a hired prize-fighter paid to interpose his burly person between the philosopher and the druggists' doorways. And we can pardon all De Quincey's indiscretions, if some of his contemporaries could not, in return for the passages on Wordsworth's poetry, on Hazlitt's style, on Coleridge's conversation, and such character-sketches as that of Wilson, Charles Lloyd, and Bishop Watson, and the exquisite picture of Charles and Mary Lamb.

In 1844 De Quincey suffered much from his chronic gastric troubles and severe mental depression. Under the stress of these maladies he fell back upon the excessive use of laudanum, and had a return of his former experiences—a spell of demoralization and gloom which threatened the loss of reason. And again by persistent effort and careful dietetic management he was able to emancipate himself sufficiently to keep the habit under some amount of control. He did not abandon it entirely, being convinced that a moderate indulgence in this stimulant had now become necessary and could not be given up without injury to his health and intellectual activity. Herein he was no doubt right. Opium was by no means an unmitigated "curse" to De Quincey, except when he took too much of it. Consumed in moderation it was probably beneficial. He himself believed that he owed the prolongation of his life to the drug, and that it warded off the tendency to tuberculosis of which his father had died at the age of thirty-nine. He suffered from other maladies, and particularly from a species of gastralgia, or a low inflammatory condition of the mucous membrane of the stomach, amounting at times to ulceration. This distressing disease, which often leads to extreme nervous disturbance and renders the patient unable to take solid food without severe pain, is best relieved by opium. De Quincey's "opium-

eating," so long as it was kept within bounds, was in fact a form of medical treatment, and on the whole that which was best suited to his chronic complaint. "How much," said Dr. Warburton Begbie, the physician who attended him on his deathbed, "the substantial power and brilliant fancy of his writings had to do with the opium-eating I do not inquire; but that it helped to keep active and entire, during so many long years of bodily feebleness, that large and constant-working brain—that, in a word, it fed it—I have no manner of doubt."

At any rate, we have the fact that this man of frail physique and overstrung nerves, so delicate as a child that his life was despaired of, a constant martyr to neuralgia as well as to acute dyspepsia, lived to the age of seventy-four with his intellectual, and to a great extent his physical, powers unimpaired almost to the close. Neither opium, nor advancing age, nor ill-health caused him to abandon his habit of outdoor exercise. He walked miles most days—or nights—in wet weather or fine. His publisher, Hogg, describes how De Quincey, at seventy, starting with him from Lasswade one hot summer afternoon, easily walked him down. They came to a steep hill which De Quincey "ascended like a squirrel," talking of the beauties of Herder all the way to the younger man who arrived at the summit "much exhausted." In these later years his specific physical maladies became less troublesome, and he was released alike from the severer forms of pain and from the necessity of applying the remedy in any but quite manageable doses.

His literary activity was never greater, nor the quality of his work higher, than in the seventh decade of his life. Between his sixtieth and seventieth years he produced his most imaginative prose, his best critical essays, and his most successful effort in fiction. The *Suspiria de Profundis*, and *The English Mail-Coach*, the prose-elegy on Joan of Arc, papers on Hazlitt, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth's poetry, and Landor, and *The Spanish Military Nun*, belong to this period. In

the animation of his thought, the exuberance of his fancy, the richness and variety of his style, and the quality of his humour, De Quincey at sixty and sixty-five shows no falling off from his own best standard of achievement a quarter of a century earlier.

In spite of his shy shrinking from observation and his eccentric habits—partly perhaps because of them—he had become a celebrity. Strangers, from America and elsewhere, sometimes sought to track him to one of his lairs, and Edinburgh literary society tried to lure him to its dinner-tables not always without success. His fame as a conversationalist was great and well deserved; for when his lips were unsealed in congenial company a silvery flood of learning, wit, fancy, and philosophy poured from them, and he would hold his hearers enchained until the lights burnt low. He had Coleridge's fertility and Macaulay's invincible memory, without the egotistical absorption of either; for he was always gentle, courteous, and considerate, willing to listen as well as talk. Of his personal characteristics and oddities we have several records. Carlyle's vignette is unkind but compelling:

“He was a pretty little creature, full of wire-drawn ingenuities; bankrupt enthusiasms, bankrupt pride; with the finest silver-toned low voice, and most elaborate gently-winding courtesies and ingenuities in conversation. You would have taken him, by candle-light, for the beautifullest little Child; blue-eyed, blond-haired, sparkling face—had there not been something too which said, ‘*Eccovi*, this child has been in Hell.’”

Thomas Hill Burton gave a more elaborate picture of him as “Papaverius” in *The Book-hunter*, as he appeared to a sympathetic eye during the middle portion of his Edinburgh career:

“. . . A strangely fragile, unsubstantial, and puerile figure wherein, however, resided one of the most potent and original spirits that ever frequented a tenement of clay. . . . The first impression that a boy has appeared vanishes instantly. On the contrary, on one occasion when he corrected an erroneous reference to an event as

being a century old by saying he recollected its occurrence, one felt almost a surprise at the necessary limitation in his age—so old did he appear, with his arched brow loaded with thought, and the countless little wrinkles which engrained his skin, gathering thickly round the curious expressive and subtle lips. These lips are speedily opened by some casual remark, and presently the flood of talk passes forth from them, free, clear, and continuous—never rising into declamation, never losing a certain mellow earnestness, and all consisting of sentences as exquisitely joined together as if they were destined to challenge the criticism of the remotest posterity. Still the hours stride over each other, and still flows on the stream of gentle rhetoric, as if it were *labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum*. . . . Roofed by a huge wide-awake which makes his tiny figure look like the stalk of some great fungus, and with a lantern of more than common dimensions in his hand, away he goes—down the wooded path, up the steep bank, along the brawling stream, and across the waterfall—and ever as he goes there comes from him a continued stream of talk concerning the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, and other kindred matters. Surely if we two were to be seen by any human eyes, it must have been supposed that some gnome or troll or kelpie was luring the listener to his doom. The worst of such affairs as this was the consciousness that, when left, he would continue walking on until, weariness overcoming him, he would take his rest wherever that happened like some poor mendicant. He used to denounce with the most fervid eloquence that barbarous and brutal provision of the law of England which rendered sleeping in the open air an act of vagrancy and so punishable if the sleeper could not give a satisfactory account of himself—a thing which Papaverius could never give under any circumstances.”

His eccentricities diminished in the last ten years of his life, and he passed much of his time in the quiet domesticity of Lasswade, though he continued to give his family trouble by his habit of renting depositories

for his papers in Edinburgh, and by his "wanton charity," as Mrs. Baird Smith calls it, in relieving every mendicant or other person in real or pretended distress who chose to ask him for alms. "His presence at home was the signal for a crowd of drunken beggars, among whom borrowed babies and drunken old women were sure of the largest share of his sympathy." "He was not," adds his daughter, "a reassuring man for nervous people to live with, as those nights were exceptions on which he did not set something on fire, the commonest incident being for some one to look up from work or book to say casually 'Papa, your hair is on fire,' of which a calm 'Is it, my love?' and a hand rubbing out the blaze was all the notice taken."

His reputation in these years had been growing in America even more than in Britain, and many readers were anxious to have his writings in an accessible form. To meet this demand the Boston publishing firm of Ticknor and Fields began to disinter his papers from the various periodicals in which they had appeared in order to issue them in a uniform and regular shape. This was the American Edition of De Quincey's Works published in twenty volumes, between 1851 and 1855. The edition was authorized by De Quincey, and he gave some assistance to it, receiving in return a liberal share of the profits of the sale from the Boston house. At the same time he was engaged upon another edition, in which he took a more direct and personal part. The enterprise was carried out by James Hogg, to whose magazine De Quincey began to contribute freely in 1849, when he abandoned his long connection with Blackwood. In 1850 Hogg induced him to begin supervising the republication of such of his writings as he deemed best worth preservation in a permanent form. The project was beset with many difficulties. For thirty years De Quincey had been scattering himself up and down the English and Scottish reviews, magazines, and cyclopaedias. He had kept no index, analysis, or systematic record of these various contributions; some of them had been forgotten by everybody,

including the author, and they had to be searched out among the dusty files of periodicals which perhaps had ceased to appear. For a man of De Quincey's dilatory and unmethodical habits, the task of recovery, classification, and arrangement might well have seemed insuperable. How it was accomplished is graphically described by Professor Masson :

The American edition, coming over to him in successive volumes, was his greatest help; but till it was complete and sometimes even then, he had to rummage for his old papers, or employ Mr. Hogg to rummage for him, hurriedly squeezing together what was readiest at intervals, to make up a volume when the press became ravenous. Hence the most provoking jumble in the contents of the volumes—mixed kinds of matter in the same volume, and dispersion of the same kind of matter in the volumes wide apart, and yet all with a pretence of grouping and with factitious sub-titles invented for the separate volumes on the spur of the moment.

In one way or another the business got itself performed, and the edition, under the title *Selections Grave and Gay from Writings published and unpublished by Thomas de Quincey*, appeared in fourteen volumes, between 1853 and 1860. It was reissued (1862-1871) in sixteen volumes as *De Quincey's Works* by Messrs. A. and C. Black. The same firm some years later brought out *The Collected Writings of Thomas de Quincey*, under the editorship of Prof. Masson (14 vols., 1889-90), with elaborate notes, prefaces, and biographical and bibliographical introductions. No praise can be too high for the industry and scholarly care which the editor bestowed upon this monument to a writer whom he regarded with unqualified admiration. It is to be regretted that he included in the collection a good deal of fugitive matter which De Quincey himself would have willingly let die. Nor is the editor's scheme of re-arrangement, under which he sometimes welds together papers separated in their composition by long intervals of time, altogether satisfactory. But a completely satisfactory edition of an author whose work was produced under such fragmentary and tormenting conditions is no doubt beyond the compass of

human endeavour. Masson, at any rate, has given the world a worthy *editio princeps*, and all students of De Quincey must be grateful to him for his labours.

The work of recension, arrangement, and classification for the *Selections* was done by De Quincey at 42, Lothian Street, the last and best of his Edinburgh lodgings, where he was in good hands and carefully tended. Only the unremitting efforts and kindly pressure of Mr. Hogg could have kept the perturbed but diligent and painstaking little workman at his toil till it was brought to its conclusion. On the whole, however, it would seem that these closing years were among the happiest of his life. Age had toned down his eccentricities, and had also, as it sometimes does, relieved him of his chronic gastric complaint; the tyranny of opium was relaxed; he was not unconscious of the attentions he received from Americans and other admiring strangers; and he enjoyed the society of a few Edinburgh friends, and found infinite comfort in such contact as he could obtain with the surviving members of his scattered family. Miss De Quincey still kept the cottage at Lasswade, and her father, indefatigable pedestrian almost to the end, made nothing of walking the seven miles out from Edinburgh to spend the evening with her. In his seventy-third year he was induced to pay a visit to his eldest daughter Margaret, then married and living in Ireland, and the mother of two young sons whom De Quincey saw for the first time.

He was still occupied with literary projects and ideas, and proposed to Hogg a new History of England in twelve volumes, which he thought he could complete in four years. It would have been an extraordinarily interesting book, though one may doubt whether at any period of his career De Quincey could have lived through the composition of twelve volumes devoted to a single subject. At any rate it was now too late to make the attempt. In the autumn of 1859, having entered upon his seventy-fifth year, his health began to fail fast, from general debility rather than from any specific malady; and on December 8th he passed away in the Lothian

Street lodging, with his eldest and youngest daughters at his bedside. He was buried in the West Churchyard at Edinburgh beside his wife and two of his children.

De Quincey, in the Preface to the Edinburgh edition, divided his writings under three heads: first, those which "propose primarily to amuse the reader," such as the autobiographical sketches; secondly, those that address themselves chiefly to the understanding, like the critical, biographical, and historical essays, the papers on the Roman Caesars, etc.; and thirdly, that "far higher class of compositions," which are described as "modes of impassioned prose ranging under no precedents that I am aware of in any literature," that is to say, the *Confessions*, the *Suspiria de Profundis*, and the dream-series in general.

The classification is hasty and unscientific, nor did De Quincey himself adhere to it in the arrangement of his papers. It certainly does not enable us to find the connecting thread which binds together the loose sheaves he left strewn upon the harvest field of the periodical press of his time, nor does it assist us to indicate in a phrase the precise quality and character of his genius. His own luminous, if now somewhat threadbare, distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power is more fruitful. All the best of his writing belongs to the latter class, even when it seems intended by its subject "primarily to amuse" or to convey information. Literature, according to his conception, in its highest expression, was an appeal to "the understanding heart," and its function was that of raising the whole emotional nature to a higher pitch of intensity. Mere intelligence he regarded as "the meanest quality of the human mind," and to minister to that alone was not the purpose of the literary artist, whose duty it was, even when engaged in instruction and explanation, to illuminate his subject by exhibiting its relations with other aspects of human or natural activity, to expose its elements of pathos, of humour, of sublimity, to show how it touches upon that sea of infinite mystery in which all

our knowledge is islanded. Often he fell below his own standard, writing as he did too hurriedly and too much. But these are the characteristics of his best pieces, and to a certain extent they are revealed in all, though not to the same extent, and though their manifestations are too often embedded in a soil sprouting with a rank undergrowth of the trivial and the irrelevant.

His genius was of a kind unique in our literature, or it may be in any literature. The gifts of insight, of imaginative vision, of supreme expression were his; but he was not endowed in any equal degree with the ethical or the creative passion. He was a Seer, but not a prophet; he had no message to deliver, no faith to expound. And though he steeped himself in the beauty and the mystery of life, it was not with that impulse to produce things beautiful and mysterious which has inspired most of the greater masters, whether of form, of colour, of music, or of words. Thus he was not the poet, ποιητής, the "maker," any more than he was the philosopher. He did not burn to vindicate the ways of God to man, to explain the moral order, to lift the veil of appearances and reveal the reality it hides, to find a way through the confused labyrinth of being, to project the energy of his own soul upon the consciousness of others. The systematizing and the productive faculties were both weak in him. All the philosophies of all the ages had filtered through the convolutions of his brain, but he wrote no philosophic treatise. He would indeed have written nothing but for the urgent stimulus of external necessity, nor did he begin to write until he was moving towards middle-age. Yet, as the immense exuberant fertility of nearly forty later years showed, this was due to no coldness of the mental organism, no lack of inventive capacity or difficulty of expression. It was the productive instinct that lay dormant; no irrepressible impulse drove him on to create; he would have been content to the end, perhaps, to ponder, to wonder, to analyse, and to dream.

"From my birth," he said, "I was made an intellectual creature, and intellectual in the highest sense my

pursuits and pleasures have been." The statement may be easily misunderstood. If by an intellectual creature is meant a nature compact only of thought and reason, cut off from the springs of feeling, then assuredly De Quincey did not belong to the species. He was shot through with sympathy, emotion, sensitiveness, intense and almost morbid affection; he was a man of many sorrows and acquainted with grief, and a man also of many joys, which were not those of the mind but of the heart, the joys of love, fatherhood, friendship, charity; his "pursuits and pleasures" included a not illiberal gratification of the senses. But De Quincey was a creature of the intellect, for he was one who sought to understand life rather than to act upon it or to add to it. Deficient in the ethical impulse, wanting in the creative faculty, with no practical efficiency whatever, he was an inspired expositor; a critic and commentator of genius, with a passionate interest in every manifestation of human activity and individuality, with the eye to see into and see *through* much that was revealed imperfectly to others, and with the knowledge and the judgement to exhibit things in their relativity. History, literature, economics, social ethics, the problems of personality and character and mental experience, as he drew them from the reservoirs of his own consciousness and memory, he exposed to view, heightened, enriched, and ennobled to the fullest extent the subject permitted by distinction of style, by vigour of imagination, by the results of wide reading and keen observation, by an alert sense of humour, and by an instant response to the appeal of mystery and pathos. The moralist may explain life, the philosopher may explain it away, the artist may imitate it. De Quincey preferred to examine and describe it; not so much concerned to show it bad or make it good, as to render it interesting.

I began by saying that De Quincey was a great journalist. He was so, and not merely for the purely mechanical reason that he published his works in periodicals and in fragments. He had the journalistic temper, the spirit which informs the avocation for those to whom it

is something more than a trade. To the journalist the world may seem ugly, evil, purposeless, unorganized; but he cannot afford to find it dull. When the curtain is up—and for him it is never down—he must not yawn over the puppets on the stage, or allow himself to remember that what moves before him is but a passing pageant, transitory, brief, unreal. He must deem Life interesting in all its multiplex manifestations; interest is to him what beauty is to the artist and goodness to the saint. To De Quincey the world was a very great and wonderful show. That faded wisp of a man, trembling before strident landladies in obscure lodgings, moving furtively through dim Edinburgh streets, or wandering among the miry lanes at midnight, was incessantly unrolling before his mind some scene in the picture-play of humanity.

Life gives her mysteries and her glories not to the eye that has seen or the ear that has heard but to the visualizing auditory brain. One man may gather more impressions from a ride in a suburban tram-car than another will bring back from a journey round the globe.

'Tis but to measure a cord and to prove limitation we travel.

De Quincey had travelled but little; he had not seen, or "done" much; nor for that matter had Thomas Carlyle or William Wordsworth. But, like those great teachers, he made up for the poverty of external impressions by the flame of imaginative intensity in which he fused all the knowledge gained from observation, experience, contemplation, and learning. He was on the watch for the slightest indications that could guide him towards the interesting and the significant. He has told us in his *Autobiography* that his gaze was "fixed and fascinated" at a very early age by one section of the tale of Aladdin in the *Arabian Nights*. It is that which tells how the magician in the heart of Africa is listening with his ear to the ground for the footsteps of a child in the streets of Baghdad, who alone can declare the secret of the lamp. De Quincey's imagination was caught by this picture of

the wonder-worker disentangling from all the clamant sounds of earth the beat of one solitary infant's tread on the banks of the Tigris, "distant by four hundred and forty days march of an army or a caravan." The reader, he says, who comes to that Eastern tale with his imagination alive,

Has the power still more unsearchable of reading in that hasty movement an alphabet of new and infinite symbols; for in order that the sound of the child's feet should be significant and intelligible, that sound must open into a gamut of infinite compass. The pulses of the heart, the motions of the will, the phantoms of the brain, must repeat themselves in secret hieroglyphics uttered by the flying footsteps. Even the inarticulate or brutal sounds of the globe must be all so many languages and ciphers that somewhere have their corresponding keys—have their own grammar and syntax; and thus the least things in the universe must be secret mirrors to the greatest.

Even so was De Quincey's ear laid close to the earth, to find "new and infinite symbols" in the confusion of sounds that came to him from places near or remote, from the passing or the vanished years. He caught the tramp of marching armies, the song of feasters at Roman banquets, the shout of triumph, the sigh of the desolate, the sorrowful murmur of the poor, the restless tumult of action. His is the true journalist's motto: *quidquid agunt homines*. But he took it in the wider sense; not only what men do, but what also they think and feel is the loading of his many pages. He has the journalistic impressionism; he takes the aspect of his subject that strikes him at the moment, shows it in its significance, its relationships, its picturesqueness, and then leaves it. He makes it no part of a systematic whole; he writes an "article," not a treatise. And he has the journalistic weakness or the journalistic strength of over-emphasis. The poet exaggerates the element of beauty, the philosopher the element of system, the journalist, like the dramatist, the element of interest. The journalist in De Quincey heightened the effect of emotions, incidents, sentiments, experiences, his own or those of others, but particularly his own, till they become

colossal. Consider his tremendous account of the Williams crimes in the Postscript to *Murder as One of the Fine Arts*, a truly sublime example of "writing up" news, a piece of descriptive reporting *in excelsis*; or let the reader turn to *The English Mail Coach*,¹ and reflect that the whole magnificent "Vision of Sudden Death" is based upon nothing more remarkable than a collision between two carriages on the King's highway which might have occurred—but did not. You might have a Vision of Sudden Death every time you cross the Strand, if you were De Quincey. The *Confessions*, the whole opium series, are vitalized by the same power of investing the commonplace, the ordinary, the trivial with mystery, romance, and pathos.

De Quincey was possessed of an incessant inquisitiveness, but that was no merely intellectual quality. It was, to adapt a famous phrase, curiosity touched with emotion. His best achievements, whether of reminiscence, exposition, or description, are instinct not merely with thought, but with feeling. He wrote well because he felt deeply.

That, I think, is what gives his style its magic and its charm. It is a great error to represent De Quincey as a mere brilliant rhetorician. He does, it is true, deliberately strive at times after rhetorical effect, and attain it. Style, as he says, has two main functions: "first to brighten the *intelligibility* of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal *power* and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities." In order to convey subtle or profound shades of meaning with the fullest arresting effect only two modes of composition are effective; the one is the employment of metre, which is the natural vehicle for impassioned thought; the other is that kind of eloquence by which an orator appeals to an audience already stimulated by an atmosphere of excitement and the contagion of the crowd. The writer of prose has neither advantage; he must create the atmosphere, and

¹ See *infra*, p. 106.

find a substitute for that elevation of tone and increase of tension naturally produced by metre. De Quincey aimed at the same effects, so far as his medium permitted, by the use of a stately and expressive vocabulary, by the flowing rhythms of his sentences, by the exquisite and balanced music of his cadences, by the Miltonic harmony of his long periods, and by a bannered pomp of metaphor, illustration, and imagery. The process reaches its consummation in those "modes of impassioned prose," like the *Suspiria de Profundis* and the dream-passages of the *Confessions*, which have the quality of poetry in their appeal to depths of emotion and phases of consciousness that lie beyond the plane of ordinary experience.

But it would be an error to suppose that De Quincey's adoption of this method was a mere literary artifice. Indeed it would convey a wrong impression to say that he "adopted" any manner of writing at all. For he held with Wordsworth that language was not the garb of thought, but its incarnation: the form in which the mind reveals itself to the external world. The style is organically, rather than mechanically, associated with the idea and the treatment; it is a living thing, and it draws its nutriment from the roots of the author's temperament, his outlook upon life, his philosophic attitude, his special genius. *Le style c'est l'homme*. In De Quincey's case it must be remembered that his style represented the reaction against the pseudo-classicism, the hard rationalism, and the severe conventionality, of the eighteenth century. He was the prose-poet, the critic and essayist, of the romantic movement. The great formative influences upon his mind at its most receptive period were Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry and the metaphysics of Kant; and though the earlier idolatrous admiration was much qualified later, his writing bore to the end the impress of the Lake school and the Transcendentalists, or rather of the spirit which had animated both the poets and the philosophers. Like them, he rejected that predominant claim of the human intellect which the leaders of eighteenth-century thought and literature had as-

serted. They appealed to the understanding mind; their successors to the understanding heart; the one set liked to plant their feet on the well-kept path of positive knowledge, the others strayed into the dim coppices and flowering meadowlands of emotion and faith. Their temper is reflected in the diversity of their styles. A prose, which is acute and enlightening rather than sympathetic, would naturally fall into a "correct" regularity. But that which aims at quickening and stimulating what De Quincey calls "the human sensibilities," which seeks "power" by raising man to his highest level of emotional capacity, must be rich, subtle, allusive, and rhythmical. De Quincey could not emulate the thin lucidity of Locke and Hume any more than Shelley could have written like Pope, or John Ruskin like James Mill.

But if the style is the incarnation of the thought it is also the representation of the subject. De Quincey's varied according to the nature of the theme. It is not always or even commonly keyed to the highest pitch, it is rhetorical and ornate only at intervals. Often it is merely critical and argumentative; the trumpet-notes and orchestral harmonies sink to the easy tones of conversation; the music of the long flowing sentences breaks up into the rapid staccato of satire or the dance of wit; too frequently it patters along in page after page of undignified colloquialism and discursive triviality. I do not think it is seen quite at its best in those chromatic passages which have become famous, where the struggle to produce a striking effect is sometimes obvious enough to impart a sense of artificiality and affectation. There is a nearer approach to perfection in many of the autobiographical and critical papers where the fluent rhythm of the phrasing holds the reader's attention without effort, and where expressions of singular felicity and freshness rise quietly like daisies in the grass, and sometimes cluster into groups of perfumed blossom, or hang star-like heads drenched with the dew of tears. The humour and the pathos of life are always with De Quincey. Of the latter quality there can be no question.

There are few writers who arrest one so often with some phrase that knocks upon the heart with the note of wistfulness, of sorrow, of the sense of loss and bereavement, of that "yearning too obstinate after one irrecoverable face," which is his own beautiful definition of the Latin *desiderium*. He was born under a grieving star; melancholy, growing with solitude and opium, had set its seal upon him, and though he sought relief in the contemplation of action, heroic enterprise, patriotic achievement, for him, nevertheless, the world-spectacle moved against a background of world-sorrow, and the figures of mankind were shadows flickering upon the curtain of Infinity. It is here that he touches hands with his contemporaries, the greater poets of the romantic revival.

He did not reach their level. With all his gifts he does not rank among the elect few whose writings have profoundly and permanently affected the human spirit. His genius was checked by too many limitations to allow it to reach its full fruition. His mind, like his writing, was fragmentary and inchoate. He had thought of many things; but it seems that he had thought out none. We search his works in vain for any systematic view of life, for any coherent philosophy, for any complete handling of any theme. He can throw beams of vivid illumination upon any part of any subject, but not on the whole. There are brilliant flashes of truth everywhere, but they are not followed out: they guide us to nothing, or lead us astray into some tangled swamp of discursive prolixity. Often it seems as if he worked without method or plan, writing as the thoughts came into his head, throwing upon paper whatever *trouvaille* rose to his hand as he ransacked [the vast uncatalogued stores of his miscellaneous reading, running breathlessly up any by-path of scholarship, reminiscence, illustration that crossed the main track. An essay may start on one topic, and go wandering off upon half-a-dozen others, until the thread of continuity is lost, and the reader loses patience with the jumble of wit, erudition, triviality, and argument in which he finds himself involved. De Quincey condemned "anec-

dotage," but he is himself an inveterate and shameless anecdotist.

His digressions are sometimes amazing in their irrelevance, and occasionally he will pile digression upon digression in a bewildering fashion. A hundred examples might be given. Thus in one of the essays on Wordsworth, contributed to *Tait's Magazine*, he sets out with some appearance of regularity to speak of the poet's birth and parentage. But before he has fairly started on this road he remembers that Wordsworth's father was agent to "the bad Lord Lonsdale," and he promptly drops Wordsworth and goes off for some pages upon an account of that nobleman, his temper, his eccentricities, his duels, his "thundering droves of wild horses," and so forth. In another paper of the series on the Lake Poets he finds occasion to mention Wordsworth's teatable. This leads him into disquisitions on (1) lawyers in the House of Commons, and the reason of their frequent failure as parliamentary orators; (2) the connection between dinner and conversation; (3) the hour of the chief meal among the Greeks and the Romans; with (4) a subsidiary digression (in a Note) on the proper meaning of *coena* and *prandium*. After this, with the casual remark "I have been led insensibly into this digression," he gets back to his narrative; only, however, to break off a page or so later into a discussion of the roads through the Westmorland passes, and the method of driving over them. Again, the essay on Sir William Hamilton is occupied with rambling dissertations upon postal difficulties in the Lake Country, upon Professor Wilson, upon youth and age, upon "civilation," boxing, Achilles and the tortoise, the drunkenness of the Cretans, and various other matters, in the course of which the philosopher and his philosophy are barely mentioned. But to give adequate illustration of this tendency would lead one to imitate De Quincey's own discursiveness.

He was aware of his weakness in this respect, and he put it down, as he did much else, to opium. "I am sensible that my record is far too diffuse. Feeling this at the very time of writing I was yet unable to correct

it; so little self-control was I able to exercise under the afflicting agitations and the unconquerable impatience of my nervous malady." The passage may be compared with what De Quincey says generally of the effects of the drug:

Opium gives and it takes away. It defeats the steady habit of exertion; but it creates spasms of irregular energy. It ruins the natural powers of life; but it develops preternatural paroxysms of intermitting power.

In a touching and deeply interesting letter to an intimate friend, quoted by Dr. Japp,¹ he goes more closely into the case:—

Through the ruin, and by the help of the ruin, I looked into and read the later states of Coleridge. His chaos I comprehended by the darkness of my own, and both were the work of laudanum. It is as if ivory carvings and elaborate fretwork and fair enamelling should be found with worms and ashes amongst coffins and the wrecks of some forgotten life or some abolished nature. In parts and fractions eternal creations are carried on, but the nexus is wanting, and life and the central principle which should bind together all the parts at the centre, with all its radiations to the circumference, are wanting. Infinite incoherence, ropes of sand, gloomy incapacity of vital pervasion by some one plastic principle, that is the hideous incubus upon my mind always.

I believe that this is a correct summary of the writer's psychological condition; no doubt opium aggravated it, and its special literary manifestations were encouraged by the habit of production for the periodical press. One may doubt, however, whether the results would have been very different if De Quincey had never tasted laudanum and had never contributed to the magazines. The passage just given was written under the depression produced by a prolonged relapse into the excesses of the drug habit; but in it the writer lays his finger upon the source of his limitations. The central nexus *was* wanting; the plastic principle: which might have bound together and moulded into shape the whole

¹ H. A. Page, *Thomas De Quincey*, vol. i, p. 325.

organism, fired it with a less fitful and flickering flame of creative impulse; or kept it glowing with the steady warmth of some great directing purpose. "Infinite incoherence, ropes of sand," is an unduly bitter piece of self-criticism; yet even the convinced admirer of De Quincey must feel in his heart that there is some ground for it.

Industrious as he was in the acquisition of knowledge, painstaking in actual composition, De Quincey suffered from a kind of intellectual impotence, an incapacity for virile and concentrated mental effort. He played with great ideas, but he could not strain them to his heart with the ardour of possession, set the impress of his personality upon them, and force them to bear the children of his soul. When the search for truth threatens to become exhausting, he is quite content to abandon it in order to sit down by the wayside and pluck a flower, or, it may be, a weed, from the hedgerows. He is too often satisfied to be merely suggestive, to find something interesting to say about one or other aspect of his theme, instead of working it out to a conclusion, or making it a part of a coherent whole. His mosaic is full of charming bits and gleaming tessellations; but the design, the synthetic pattern, is weak. His attitude towards some of the greater questions is almost exasperating. No man, as his essay on *The Political Parties of Modern England* shows, had a more luminous insight into the real character of our party system and the evolution it was undergoing; yet, because it was too much trouble to throw over his prejudices and shape out a new formula, he lazily acquiesced in remaining, as he says, "a perfect specimen of a fossil Tory." And in religion, this student of all the theologies and the philosophies is back among the orthodox divines and Anglican bishops, the Warburtons, and Hurds, and Beatties of the eighteenth century, accepting the plenary inspiration of the Bible, "submitting to every proposition in the Scriptures which is really and truly there," and persuading himself that the Thirty-nine Articles were quite consistent with the higher rationalism, if one only understood Reason in the

correct Kantian sense. He was content to repose on a vague and rather bigoted Anglicanism, which had at least the advantage of fortifying him in his hostility against Radicalism, Freethinkers, Roman Catholics, French scepticism, and other things and persons he disliked. On the relations of Christianity to the modern movement of thought he professed to have pondered with the utmost profundity; but he flinched from the task of formulating a definite philosophical creed grounded upon faith and revelation. His life was strewn with great refusals.¹

I have dwelt somewhat upon these defects since it is necessary to explain why De Quincey has fallen short both of the highest standard of popularity and the highest level of achievement. I suppose it is not to be hoped that the mass of his writings will ever again find a body of readers proportionate in number to their merits; nor can one claim that their author stands among the few great lonely figures whose place is secure through the ages. But we need not belittle or reject the work a man of genius has done because he has not done something else. De Quincey's station among our Masters of Literature is high if it is not quite with the highest. As an Essayist it would be hard to find his superior. No one has excelled him in taking one branch of some large subject and rendering it fruitful and significant by bathing it in a stream of original reflection, varied illustration, unhackneyed knowledge, and luminous comment. You cannot read a page or two of

¹ Lest I may seem to do injustice to De Quincey here I give (in the *Analecta* at the end of this volume) some passages from one of the Essays on Coleridge where it is suggested that there can be no philosophy of the highest kind which does not begin and end with Christianity. But this proposition, though De Quincey frequently recurs to it, he did not develop, or attempt to substantiate, save in a fragmentary and superficial fashion. His attitude towards religion was not in reality very different from that of Dr. Johnson, though he moved in an atmosphere which that sturdy champion of Toryism and the Church of England had never breathed, and under a firmament shot with lights invisible to the Johnsonian eye.

De Quincey, even when he is most formless and most irritatingly discursive or trivial, without coming upon some sentence that arrests you with its perfected felicity of expression, some phrase that almost startles with its pregnant suggestiveness, its sudden glimpse of half-seen avenues and dim cathedral aisles of thought, some shaft that carries far below the surface of things. He shed the rays of a penetrating insight and a large sympathetic intelligence over history, philosophy, literature, and society; and if he settled nothing he illuminated everything, so that whether you read him on the Roman Caesars, on the toilet of the Hebrew lady, on the last days of Kant, on secret societies, on Judas Iscariot, or on English cookery, you are sure to find new lights thrown upon the subject and new ideas introduced. His mind possessed the rare quality of being equally at home with abstract thought and with concrete vital realities. He is a logician with a sense of humour. He loved subtle analysis, but he also loved humanity in all its phases. So there is no theme which he can handle for long on the coldly intellectual flame. He must bring it to earth to exhibit it in its relation to life and to the elements of mystery, pathos, and paradox, of which life is built up.

He exhibits this characteristic even in his treatment of economics. As a political economist he is now forgotten. But his *Logic of Political Economy*, the only formal treatise he ever wrote, will repay study, for it is a really remarkable contribution to the science, written at a period when the "classical" theory was in the ascendant and the pontificate of Mill presently to be established. On the whole he accepted the doctrines of Adam Smith, modified by Ricardo, for whom he had an intense admiration. But he rebelled against the mythology of the Utilitarians with their unreal figures of the Consumer and Producer and the rest, their crude analysis of motives, and their readiness to regard limited and local tendencies as universal laws. Mill waved him aside rather haughtily, and some of Mill's disciples have spoken as if it were gross presumption on the part

of De Quincey, a mere literary person, to enter the *hortus conclusus* of the professor and the practical man. But in some respects he was much closer to the line of later thought than the philosopher of the India House; for he showed that the abstractions like Supply and Demand, to which the English "classic" writers attribute a kind of mysterious potency as if they were forces of nature, are, in fact, only names that cover the actions and desires of human beings. There is nothing dull or "dismal" in his dissertation on these points in the *Logic* and in the series of papers called *Dialogues of Three Templars*. The keenness of the analysis and the close precision of the reasoning are found consistent with a flexibility and distinction of style like a rose-garden in a barren land after the forbidding aridity and the cold dogmatism with which the masters of political economy have so often chosen to convey their opinions to the world.

The same qualities are revealed in a large measure in his *Literary Criticism*. Here, as in other parts of his writings, we see his peculiar and exceptional quality, well described by Dr. Japp as "the logical or quantitative faculty working alongside the dreaming or purely abstractive faculty without sense of discord." In his criticism he is often perverse, and he mingles passages which deserve his own favourite epithet of "sublime" with undignified gossip, creaking satire, and forced jocularities; he is wilfully blind to the merits of some writers and hyperbolic in his praises of others. All the same he is one of the most inspiring and the most pregnant of critics. He loved literature for its own sake; and his wide miscellaneous reading and prodigious memory made it easy for him to handle the works of many authors, to compare and to contrast them in a singularly fruitful fashion.

He brought to the task something more than a mere intellectual curiosity. Literature to him was always kept in its place; it is not, as he says, life itself but only an aspect, a manifestation, of life. Below the written word, as below the external fact, he was perpetually searching

for the vital principle, for the realities they symbolized. "Problems of taste," considered in the light of a philosophical method, "expand to problems of human nature"; and literary art is in itself no more than a part of the larger creation of which it is significant. He speaks the language of the great Romantics of whom he was the interpreter when he defines poetry as "the science of human passion in all its fluxes and refluxes—in its wondrous depths below depths, and its starry attitudes that ascended to the heavens."

Here, too, he was in the reaction against those who had set the brain above the heart, the capacity to reason over the capacity to feel. His criticism is sometimes extraordinarily valuable, because while it carefully examines the mechanism of literary composition, while it seeks to explain the effects produced by deductions from intelligible rules, it recurs in the end to that "unfathomed deep" of emotion which surges below all artistic expression. Passion is requisite even for true intellectual revelation. Without struggle and suffering there can be no penetrating vision, only a shallow gaze upon the surface of things. It is on this account that De Quincey insists on the superiority of the best modern, over the best of the ancient, literature, the literature saturated with the sense of sorrow and sin and spiritual tumult over the frozen tranquillity of Hellenic Paganism. Milton, he thinks, has more depth, and Chaucer more humanity, than Homer; life throbs warm in the bosoms of Shakespeare's women, while it looks coldly through the "marble eyes" of the goddesses and heroines of Attic tragedy. Clytemnestra, one would think, and Medea were made of flesh and blood; but De Quincey's illustrative examples will not always bear investigation, any more than the specific applications of his literary judgement. Still he did as much as anyone in England to emancipate criticism from the bondage to words and forms, and to reconstruct our standard of literary values. His definition of genius, his masterly discrimination between "power" and knowledge, his discussion of the Miltonic "sublimity," of rhetoric and eloquence, of the

scope and limits of poetry, and many other contributions to aesthetics have been among the "dynamic influences" of the nineteenth century, and have affected thousands who know little of his actual text. And in his writing on Shelley, on Goldsmith, on Lamb and Hazlitt, on Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne, and in many other beautiful passages, he shows that criticism can itself be drawn into the circle of "power," that it can be made to move the spirit and touch the heart as well as to instruct and inform.

True it is that in his criticism of books as in his criticism of life he often reveals what has been not very happily called his "John Bullism." Anybody less like the typical John Bull I cannot imagine than this super-subtle, ultra-sensitive student, nursed on solitude and contemplation. But I suppose it is meant that he had a large share of traditional British prejudice and traditional British sentiment. He had a superstitious veneration for what was old and established; his temper in that sense was conservative; he disliked hasty innovation; he detested the Radicals, and distrusted the Whigs; and he had a hearty delight in vigorous action, in heroic deeds, in the clash of arms, in courage, enterprise, victorious energy, in the greatness and glory of England. He was almost the only one among the greater thinkers and writers of the past hundred years who was first and last an avowed Tory. But he was a Tory who knew that the Revolution, as we say now, had come to stay. "It has succeeded; it is propagating its life; it is travelling on to new births—conquering and yet to conquer." His "fossil Toryism" was consistent with the deepest sympathy with the poor, the outcasts, and the suffering, and with passionate resentment against the levity and callousness with which their wrongs were treated by the prosperous and the rich. No reforming democrat could have been touched more profoundly by the common lot of the common people.

¶ But neither as the essayist nor the critic will he live longest. It is as the explorer of the mystery and magic of the dream-world that his place is most secure.

The *Confessions* will be read even if their author's other writings are forgotten. They are perhaps likely to obtain an even wider vogue in the future. For they touch upon a vein of interest which has been opened afresh in our own day. There is a whole fashionable philosophy, a new science, growing up about the conception that the intellect, developed as a useful appendage to our physical evolution, is powerless to pierce the veil of its own conditional existence, and grasp the realities which lie behind our perception of phenomena. Only the imagination, released from the trammels of conscious mind, can soar into this region: the poet, the mystic, the visionary can pass the portal at which science halts and philosophy knocks unanswered. De Quincey deliberately set himself to throw back the gates and survey the ground beyond; he dreamed systematically, and, as it were, scientifically; he used opium, the "great tube that connects man with the infinite," to magnify his sensations and stimulate his receptivity; and all the while he was on the watch, in the very ecstasy of his possession, to observe the processes and tabulate the results. We are but on the threshold of that strange uncharted continent, that other dimension of psychical space, which we know, or do not know, as dreamland. De Quincey's dream-records, vague, uncertain, shifting, too often artificial in their conscious straining after literary effects, still keep their fascination for those who suspect that one path to transcendental truth may lie through those rich and peopled solitudes from which the Opium-eater bore back his coruscating spoils.

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on.

There can hardly be oblivion for the literary seer who added something to the illimitable significance of a thought that means perhaps more to us than it did even to him.

Of his Style perhaps enough has been said already. It has been extravagantly praised, and indeed at its best it is difficult to over-praise it; and it has been condemned

as too uniformly rhetorical, too sonorous, too elaborately ornamented. Referring to it in the course of a rather savage onslaught upon De Quincey, the late Sir Leslie Stephen enunciated the opinion¹ that the "great writers" have generally been content to adopt a form "as transparent and inconspicuous as possible," and that the best style "according to modern canons of taste," is like the best dress "which attracts least attention from its wearer." De Quincey, he adds, "scorns this sneaking maxim of prudence, and boldly challenges our admiration by appearing in the richest colouring that can be got out of the dictionary." But are we bound by a "canon of taste," which would make Sir Leslie Stephen a great writer, and put Bacon and Milton, Sterne and Carlyle, among the small ones? In any case the suggestion that De Quincey is perpetually engaged in throwing fine words at his readers is uncritical and unfair. It is an error to suppose that he is always writing a species of unmetrical poetry, or that he habitually occupies himself in striking out rotund phrases and sounding periods. On the contrary he rises to his impassioned effects and "bravura" passages somewhat rarely, and only when they are expressly demanded by the occasion. For his chief excellence is that he has not one style but many styles, and varies the manner of expression according to the theme and the emotion as a great dramatist or composer does. Between the prose of *Our Ladies of Sorrow* and that of *Murder considered as One of the Fine Arts*, there is as much difference as there is between the blank-verse of *Hamlet* and the lyrics of *As You Like It*. De Quincey has numberless changes of tone; sometimes he is smooth, "sequacious," and flowing, sometimes the sentences droop with the mournful cadence of pathos, sometimes they march with the brisk short stride of satire, often they move with the quiet, level, easy gait of argument and conversation, now and again they are swept by the symphonic winds of passion, so that they surge and roll and thunder. The style adapts itself to the thought and

¹ In the *Fortnightly Review* for March 1870.

the matter; and if there is a uniform quality anywhere it lies in the sense of rhythm, which makes every phrase pulsate with living motion, and in that subtle feeling for verbal values, alike in their sound and their significance, which causes harsh and ugly words, and those which have been worn threadbare by conventional usage, to be avoided like a false or jarring note in music.

To the appeal, the meaning, the power of music De Quincey was more intensely alive than any writer of his own age. By some of his greater contemporaries in English letters that appeal was little felt. They were barely conscious of the reach and splendour of the new romantic art that was to rival, it may be to supersede, their own. De Quincey was keenly sensitive to it. Writing of Charles Lamb he says that the sense of music "was utterly obliterated, as with a sponge, by nature herself from Lamb's organization"; and it followed that he had no sense of the rhythmical in prose composition. "Rhythms, or pomp of cadence, or sonorous ascent of clauses in the structure of sentences, were effects of art as much thrown away upon him as the voice of the charmer upon the deaf adder." He himself, he adds, occupies "the very station of polar opposition to that of Lamb, being as morbidly, perhaps, in the one excess as he is in the other." Music was his solace in the evenings at Lasswade; he delighted in the "infinity" of the violin; and in one of the notable passages of the *Confessions* he describes how he derived a pleasure, higher than that of any Turk who ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, by stimulating his nerves with laudanum so that they might vibrate more vividly to the heavenly and harp-like voice of the "angelic Grassini" at the Opera.¹ And it is music, more than any of the other arts, to which his impassioned prose is nearest akin. I can at least agree with Sir Leslie Stephen when he says that it is not "word-painting" De Quincey gives us in his more exquisite passages so much as a kind of musical composition, in which words

¹ See *infra*, p. 34.

and sentences stand for notes and phrases, and by their mere structure and combinations and rhythms attune themselves to the emotions, and suggest ideas that cannot easily be given articulate and precise expression. One may go further. Is it fanciful to suggest that the spirit of the great tone-poets gives a distinctive quality to his own best writing, so that we seem to find in it some impress or reflection of the majesty of Beethoven, the lucent vision of Mozart, the mass and volume of Handel, and the pregnant solemnity of Bach? At least one may suppose that an age like ours, too restless and impatient to find the old relief in poetry and the plastic arts, will turn again to pages which have more of music, in its varied cadences and swelling harmonies, its stormy orchestral effects and melodic sweetness, its passion and its pain, than those of any other master who ever played upon the instrument of English prose.

[The Selections given in the pages that follow are derived either from the periodical publications in which they originally appeared, or from the volumes of the Edinburgh Collective Edition of 1862-3. Some obvious errors and misprints have been corrected. I have not always thought it necessary to adhere to De Quincey's punctuation, or to his arrangement of his text in paragraphs usually of excessive length. Nor have I followed his regrettable practice of printing Greek words without the accents.—S. L.]

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THOMAS DE QUINCEY

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

THE CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER

[It was in his thirty-seventh year that De Quincey suddenly leaped into fame with the work that has taken its place among the classics of nineteenth-century literature. In September 1821 the *London Magazine*, a monthly periodical that had among its contributors Lamb, Hazlitt, Carlyle, Allan Cunningham, and other notable writers, published the first part of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. The second part followed in October. A third part was promised but did not appear. The *Confessions* at once attracted attention, they were much noticed by the newspapers, and the "English Opium-Eater" became a person of considerable interest to the public. De Quincey took advantage of the curiosity which he had aroused to contribute other papers on various subjects to the *London Magazine* during the next few years "By the author of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*," and it was as the "Opium-Eater" (sometimes veiled by the signature "X. Y. Z.") that he continued to be known to the world of magazine-readers for years. The popularity of the *Confessions* induced the publisher of the *London* to reprint them in volume form in 1822. The book went through several editions before De Quincey took it in hand in 1853 for the Edinburgh edition of his writings. In this edition the *Confessions* appear in a much extended form with many additions to the autobiographical recollections and incidents.

The *Confessions* are concerned with many things besides opium. De Quincey himself said that his main object was to lead up to an account of the dreams and visions of the night, mysterious, splendid, and terrible, which in the fullness of time come upon the victim to the drug; and the dreams he actually describes were intended to form part of a much longer series. In order to prepare the reader's mind for these revelations, De Quincey thought it necessary to relate the story of his early life up to the period when, as a strangely precocious youth of seventeen, he ran away from Manchester Grammar School and plunged

into London, an unknown and almost destitute young vagrant. The experience coloured his whole later career, and is described with such a wealth of vivid detail that many hasty readers of the *Confessions* have probably supposed that it lasted through years of desperate poverty and struggle. As a fact it endured only for a few months, when it was ended by the lad's return to his mother's house at Chester; and later in the same year, 1803, he went into residence at Oxford. But during those few months he saw much and felt much; he learnt to know what hunger was like, and homelessness and want; he joined hands with the outcasts, the pariah-women of the streets, and he gained a sense of the pathos of common things, the *lacrimae rerum*, which never left him and appears again and again in his writings to the end.]

ALONE IN LONDON

[In Part I of the *Confessions*, De Quincey, after his lengthy and interesting reminiscences of boyhood, explains how he fled from school, and found himself, penniless and alone, in London, and under an immediate necessity of obtaining money in some way.]

NOT altogether without a plan had I been from the first; and in coming along I had matured it. My success in such a plan would turn upon my chance of borrowing on personal security. £200, without counting any interest upon it, would subdivide into four sums of £50. Now, what interval was it that divided me from my majority? Simply an interval of four years. London, I knew or believed, was the dearest of all cities for three items of expenditure: (1) servants' wages; (2) lodgings;¹ (3) dairy produce. In other things, London was often cheaper than most towns. Now, in a London street, having no pretensions beyond those of decent respectability, it has always been possible for the last half century to obtain two furnished rooms at a weekly cost of half-

¹ Not universally. Glasgow, if you travel from Hammerfest southwards (that is, from the northernmost point of Norway, or Swedish Lapland, traversing all latitudes of Europe to Gibraltar on the west, or Naples on the east), is the one dearest place for lodgings known to man. A decent lodging for a single person, in Edinburgh which could be had readily for half-a-guinea a week, will in Glasgow cost a guinea. Glasgow, except as to servants, is a dearer abode than London.

a-guinea. This sum (or say £25) deducted, would leave me annually about the same sum for my other expenses. Too certainly I knew that this would suffice. If, therefore, I could obtain the £200, my plan was to withdraw from the knowledge of all my connections until I should become *mei juris* by course of law. In such a case, it is true that I must have waived all the advantages, fancied or real, small or great, from residence at a university. But, as in fact I never drew the slightest advantage or emolument from any university, my scheme when realised would have landed me in the same point which finally I attained by its failure. The plan was simple enough, but it rested on the assumption that I could melt the obduracy of money-lenders. On this point I had both hopes and fears. But more irritating than either was the *delay* which eventually I came to recognise as an essential element in the policy of all money-lenders: in that way only can they raise up such claims on behalf of their law-agents as may be fitted for sustaining their zeal.

* * * * *

I lost no time in opening the business which had brought me to London. By ten A.M., an hour when all men of business are presumed to be at their posts, personally or by proxy, I presented myself at the money-lender's office. My name was already known there: for I had, by letters from Wales, containing very plain and very accurate statements of my position in life and my pecuniary expectations (some of which statements it afterwards appeared that he had personally investigated and verified), endeavoured to win his favourable attention. The money-lender, as it turned out, had one fixed rule of action. He never granted a personal interview to any man; no, not to the most beloved of his clients. One and all—myself, therefore, among the crowd—he referred for information, and for the means of prosecuting any kind of negotiation, to an attorney, who called himself, on most days of the week, by the name of Brunell, but occasionally (might it perhaps be on *red-*

letter days?) by the more common name of Brown. Mr. Brunell-Brown, or Brown-Brunell, had located his hearth (if ever he had possessed one) and his household gods (when they were not in the custody of the sheriff) in Greek Street, Soho.

The house was not in itself, supposing that its face had been washed now and then, at all disrespectful. But it wore an unhappy countenance of gloom and unsocial fretfulness, due in reality to the long neglect of painting, cleansing, and, in some instances, of repairing. There were, however, no fractured panes of glass in the windows; and the deep silence which invested the house, not only from the absence of all visitors, but also of those common household functionaries, bakers, butchers, beer-carriers, sufficiently accounted for the desolation, by suggesting an excuse not strictly true—viz., that it might be tenantless. The house already had tenants through the day, though of a noiseless order, and was destined soon to increase them. Mr. Brown-Brunell, after reconnoitring me through a narrow side-window (such as is often attached to front-doors in London), admitted me cheerfully, and conducted me, as an honoured guest, to his private *officina diplomatium* at the back of the house. From the expression of his face, but much more from the contradictory and self-counteracting play of his features, you gathered in a moment that he was a man who had much to conceal, and much, perhaps, that he would gladly forget. His eye expressed wariness against surprise, and passed in a moment into irrepressible glances of suspicion and alarm. No smile that ever his face naturally assumed but was pulled short up by some freezing counteraction, or was chased by some close-following expression of sadness. One feature there was of relenting goodness and nobleness in Mr. Brunell's character, to which it was that subsequently I myself was most profoundly indebted for an asylum that saved my life. He had the deepest, the most liberal, and unaffected love of knowledge, but, above all, of that specific knowledge which we call literature. His own stormy (and no doubt

oftentimes disgraceful) career in life, that had entangled him in perpetual feuds with his fellow-men, he ascribed, with bitter imprecations, to the sudden interruption of his studies consequent upon his father's violent death, and to the necessity which threw him, at a boyish age, upon a professional life in the lower branches of law—threw him, therefore, upon daily temptations by surrounding him with opportunities for taking advantages not strictly honourable, before he had formed any fixed principles at all. From the very first, Mr. Brunell had entered zealously into such conversations with myself as either gave openings for reviving his own delightful remembrances of classic authors, or brought up sometimes doubts for solution, sometimes perplexities and cases of intricate construction for illustration and disentanglement. Hunger-bitten as the house and the household genius seemed, wearing the legend of *Famine* upon every mantelpiece or “coigne of vantage,” and vehemently protesting, as it must have done through all its echoes, against the introduction of supernumerary mouths, nevertheless there was (and, I suppose, of necessity) a clerk, who bore the name of Pyment, or Pyemont, then first of all, then last of all, made known to me as a possible surname. Mr. Pyment had no *alias*—or not to my knowledge—except, indeed, in the vituperative vocabulary of Mr. Brunell, in which most variegated nomenclature he bore many scores of opprobrious names, having no reference whatever to any real habits of the man, good or bad. At two rooms' distance, Mr. Brunell always assumed a minute and circumstantial knowledge of what Pyment was doing then, and what he was going to do next. All which Pyment gave himself little trouble to answer, unless it happened (as now and then it did) that he could do so with ludicrous effect. What made the necessity for Pyment was the continual call for “an appearance” to be put in at some of the subordinate courts in Westminster—courts of conscience, sheriff courts, etc. But it happens often that he who is most indispensable, and gets through most work at one hour, becomes a useless burden at another, as the

hardest working reaper seems, in the eyes of an ignorant, on a wet, wintry day, to be a luxurious idler. Of these ups and downs in Pymont's working life, Mr. Brunell made a most cynical use; making out that Pymont not only did nothing, but also that he created much work for the afflicted Brunell. However, it happened occasionally that the truth vindicated itself, by making a call upon Pymont's physics—aggressive or defensive—that needed an instant attention. "Pymont, I say; this way, Pymont; you're wanted, Pymont." In fact, both were big, hulking men, and had need to be so; for sometimes, whether with good reason or none, clients at the end of a losing suit, or of a suit nominally gained, but unexpectedly laden with heavy expenses, became refractory, showed fight, and gave Pymont reason for saying that at least on this day he had earned his salary by serving an ejection on a client whom on any other plan it might have been hard to settle with.

But I am anticipating. I go back, therefore, for a few explanatory words, to the day of my arrival in London. How beneficial to me would a little candour have been at that early period! If (which was the simple truth, known to all parties but myself) I had been told that nothing would be brought to a close in less than six months, even assuming the ultimate adoption of my proposals, I should from the first have dismissed all hopes of this nature, as being unsuited to the practicabilities of my situation. It will be seen further on that there was a real and sincere intention of advancing the money wanted. But it was then too late. And universally I believe myself entitled to say, that even honourable lawyers will not in a case of this nature move at a faster pace: they will all alike loiter upon varied allegations through six months; and for this reason, that any shorter period, they fancy, will hardly seem to justify, in the eyes of their client, the sum which they find themselves entitled to charge for their trouble and their preliminary correspondence. How much better for both sides, and more honourable, as more frank and

free from disguises, that the client should say, "Raise this sum" (of, suppose, £400) "in three weeks, which can be done, if it can be done in three years, and here is a *bonus* of £100. Delay for two months, and I decline the whole transaction." Treated with that sort of openness, how much bodily suffering of an extreme order, and how much of the sickness from hope deferred, should I have escaped! Whereas, under the system (pursued with me as with all clients) of continually refreshing my hopes with new delusions, whiling me on with pretended preparation of deeds, and extorting from me out of every little remittance I received from old family friends casually met in London as much as possible for the purchase of imaginary stamps, the result was that I myself was brought to the brink of destruction through pure inanition; whilst, on the other hand, those concerned in these deceptions gained nothing that might not have been gained honourably and rightfully under a system of plain dealing. As it was, subject to these eternal deceptions, I continued for seven or eight weeks to live most parsimoniously in lodgings. These lodgings, though barely decent in my eyes, ran away with at least two-thirds of my remaining guineas. At length, whilst it was yet possible to reserve a solitary half-guinea towards the more urgent interest of finding daily food, I gave up my rooms; and, stating exactly the circumstances in which I stood, requested permission of Mr. Brunell to make use of his large house as a nightly asylum from the open air. Parliament had not then made it a crime, next door to a felony, for a man to sleep out of doors (as some twenty years later was done by our benign legislators); as yet *that* was no crime. By the law I came to know sin; and looking back to the Cambrian hills from distant years, discovered to my surprise what a parliamentary wretch I had been in elder days, when I slept amongst cows on the open hill-sides. Lawful as yet this was; but not, therefore, less full of misery. Naturally, then, I was delighted when Mr. Brunell not only most readily assented to my request, but begged of me to

come that very night, and turn the house to account as fully as I possibly could. The cheerfulness of such a concession brought with it one drawback. I now regretted that I had not, at a much earlier period, applied for this liberty; since I might thus have saved a considerable fund of guineas, applicable, of course, to all urgent necessities, but at this particular moment to one clamorous urgency—viz., the purchase of blankets. O ancient women, daughters of toil and suffering, amongst all the hardships and bitter inheritances of flesh that ye are called upon to face, not one—not even hunger—seems in my eyes comparable to that of nightly cold. To seek a refuge from cold in bed, and then, from the thin, gauzy texture of the miserable, worn-out blankets, “not to sleep a wink,” as Wordsworth records of poor old women in Dorsetshire, where coals, from local causes, were at the very dearest—what a terrific enemy was *that* for poor old grandmothers to face in fight! How feelingly I learned at this time, as heretofore I had learned on the wild hill-sides in Wales, what an unspeakable blessing is that of warmth! A more killing curse there does not exist for man or woman than that bitter combat between the weariness that prompts sleep, and the keen, searching cold that forces you from the first access of sleep to start up horror-stricken, and to seek warmth vainly in renewed exercise, though long since fainting under fatigue. However, even without blankets, it was a fine thing to have an asylum from the open air; and to be assured of this asylum as long as I was likely to want it.

Towards nightfall I went down to Greek Street; and found, on taking possession of my new quarters, that the house already contained one single inmate—a poor, friendless child, apparently ten years old; but she seemed hunger-bitten; and sufferings of that sort often make children look older than they are. From this forlorn child I learned that she had slept and lived there alone for some time before I came; and great joy the poor creature expressed when she found that I was in future to be her companion through the hours of darkness. The house

could hardly be called large—that is, it was not large on each separate storey; but, having four storeys in all, it was large enough to impress vividly the sense of its echoing loneliness; and, from the want of furniture, the noise of the rats made a prodigious uproar on the staircase and hall; so that, amidst the real fleshly ills of cold and hunger, the forsaken child had found leisure to suffer still more from the self-created one of ghosts. Against these enemies I could promise her protection; human companionship was in itself protection; but of other and more needful aid I had, alas! little to offer. We lay upon the floor, with a bundle of law-papers for a pillow, but with no other covering than a large horseman's cloak; afterwards, however, we discovered in a garret an old sofa-cover, a small piece of rug, and some fragments of other articles, which added a little to our comfort. The poor child crept close to me for warmth, and for security against her ghostly enemies. When I was not more than usually ill, I took her into my arms, so that, in general, she was tolerably warm, and often slept when I could not; for, during the last two months of my sufferings, I slept much in the daytime, and was apt to fall into transient dozings at all hours. But my sleep distressed me more than my watching; for, besides the tumultuousness of my dreams (which were only not so awful as those which I shall have hereafter to describe as produced by opium), my sleep was never more than what is called *dog-sleep*; so that I could hear myself moaning; and very often I was awakened suddenly by my own voice. About this time a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber, which has since returned upon me, at different periods of my life—viz., a sort of twitching (I knew not where, but apparently about the region of my stomach), which compelled me violently to throw out my feet for the sake of relieving it. This sensation coming on as soon as I began to sleep, and the effort to relieve it constantly awaking me, at length I slept only from exhaustion; and, through increasing weakness (as I said before), I was constantly falling asleep and constantly awaking. Too generally the very attainment of any deep

repose seemed as if mechanically linked to some fatal necessity of self-interruption. It was as though a cup were gradually filled by the sleepy overflow of some natural fountain, the fulness of the cup expressing symbolically the completeness of the rest; but then, in the next stage of the process, it seemed as though the rush and torrent-like babbling of the redundant waters, when running over from every part of the cup, interrupted the slumber which in their earlier stage of silent gathering they had so naturally produced. Such and so regular in its swell and its collapse—in its tardy growth and its violent dispersion—did this endless alternation of stealthy sleep and stormy awaking travel through stages as natural as the increments of twilight, or the kindlings of the dawn; no rest that was not a prologue to terror; no sweet tremulous pulses of restoration that did not suddenly explode through rolling clamours of fiery disruption.

Meantime, the master of the house sometimes came in upon us suddenly, and very early; sometimes not till ten o'clock; sometimes not at all. He was in constant fear of arrest. Improving on the plan of Cromwell, every night he slept in a different quarter of London; and I observed that he never failed to examine, through a private window, the appearance of those who knocked at the door, before he would allow it to be opened. He breakfasted alone; indeed, his tea equipage would hardly have admitted of his hazarding an invitation to a second person, any more than the quantity of esculent *material*, which, for the most part, was little more than a roll, or a few biscuits, purchased on his road from the place where he had slept. Or, if he *had* asked a party, as I once learnedly observed to him, the several members of it must have *stood* in the relation to each other (not *sat* in any relation whatever) of succession, and not of co-existence; in the relation of parts of time, and not of the parts of space. During his breakfast, I generally contrived a reason for lounging in; and, with an air of as much indifference as I could assume, took up such fragments as might chance to remain; sometimes, indeed, none at all remained. In doing this I committed no robbery, except

upon Mr. Brunell himself, who was thus obliged, now and then, to send out at noon for an extra biscuit; but he, through channels subsequently explained, was repaid a thousand-fold; and, as to the poor child, *she* was never admitted into his study (if I may give that name to his chief depository of parchments, law-writings, etc.), that room was to her the Bluebeard room of the house, being regularly locked on his departure to dinner, about six o'clock, which usually was his final departure for the day. Whether this child were an illegitimate daughter of Mr. Brunell, or only a servant, I could not ascertain; she did not herself know; but certainly she was treated altogether as a menial servant. No sooner did Mr. Brunell make his appearance than she went below-stairs, brushed his shoes, coat, etc.; and, except when she was summoned to run upon some errand, she never emerged from the dismal Tartarus of the kitchens to the upper air until my welcome knock towards nightfall called up her little trembling footsteps to the front-door. Of her life during the daytime, however, I knew little but what I gathered from her own account at night; for, as soon as the hours of business commenced, I saw that my absence would be acceptable; and, in general, therefore, I went off and sat in the parks or elsewhere until the approach of twilight.

But who, and what, meantime, was the master of the house himself? Reader, he was one of those anomalous practitioners in lower departments of the law who, on prudential reasons, or from necessity, deny themselves all indulgence in the luxury of too delicate a conscience. In many walks of life a conscience is a more expensive encumbrance than a wife or a carriage; and, as people talk of "laying down" their carriages, so I suppose my friend, Mr. Brunell, had "laid down" his conscience for a time; meaning, doubtless, to resume it as soon as he could afford it. He was an advertising attorney, who continually notified to the public, through the morning papers, that he undertook to raise loans for approved parties in what would generally be regarded as desperate cases—viz., where there was nothing better than *personal*

security to offer. But, as he took good care to ascertain that there were ample funds in reversion to be counted on, or near connections that would not suffer the family name to be dishonoured, and as he insured the borrower's life over a sufficient period, the risk was not great; and even of this the whole rested upon the actual money-lender, who stood aloof in the background, and never revealed himself to clients in his proper person, transacting all affairs through his proxies learned in the law—Mr. Brunell or others. The inner economy of such a man's daily life would present a monstrous picture. Even with my limited opportunities for observing what went on, I saw scenes of intrigue and complex chicanery at which I sometimes smile to this day, and at which I smiled then in spite of my misery. My situation, however, at that time, gave me little experience, in my own person, of any qualities in Mr. Brunell's character but such as did him honour; and of his whole strange composition I ought to forget everything, but that towards me he was obliging, and, to the extent of his power, generous.

That power was not, indeed, very extensive. However, in common with the rats, I sat rent free; and, as Dr. Johnson has recorded that he never but once in his life had as much wall-fruit as he wished, so let me be grateful that, on that single occasion, I had as large a choice of rooms, or even of apartments, in a London mansion—viz., as I am now at liberty to add, at the north-west corner of Greek Street, being the house on that side the street nearest to Soho Square—as I could possibly desire. Except the Bluebeard room, which the poor child believed to be permanently haunted, and which, besides, was locked, all others, from the attics to the cellars, were at our service. "The world was all before us," and we pitched our tent for the night in any spot we might fancy. This house I have described as roomy and respectable. It stands in a conspicuous situation, and in a well-known part of London. Many of my readers will have passed it, I doubt not, within a few hours of reading this. For myself, I never fail

to visit it when accident draws me to London. About ten o'clock this very night (August 15, 1821, being my birthday), I turned aside from my evening walk along Oxford Street, in order to take a glance at it. It is now in the occupation of some family, apparently respectable. The windows are no longer coated by a paste composed of ancient soot and superannuated rain; and the whole exterior no longer wears an aspect of gloom. By the lights in the front drawing-room I observed a domestic party, assembled, perhaps, at tea, apparently cheerful and gay—marvellous contrast, in my eyes, to the darkness, cold, silence, and desolation of that same house nineteen years ago, when its nightly occupants were one famishing scholar and a poor, neglected child. Her, by the bye, in after years, I vainly endeavoured to trace. Apart from her situation, she was not what would be called an interesting child. She was neither pretty, nor quick in understanding, nor remarkably pleasing in manners. But, thank God! even in those years I needed not the embellishments of elegant accessories to conciliate my affections. Plain human nature, in its humblest and most homely apparel, was enough for me; and I loved the child because she was my partner in wretchedness. If she is now living, she is probably a mother, with children of her own; but, as I have said, I could never trace her.

ANN OF OXFORD STREET

[The concluding portion of De Quincey's London experiences in the *Confessions* deals with his further attempts to "raise the wind" by means of the money-lenders. But the narrative is interwoven with the profoundly touching and beautiful account of Ann, the poor girl with whom De Quincey became acquainted when he, like her, was a friendless wanderer on the stony pavements of Oxford Street. This celebrated episode reveals the author in his best mood of emotional pathos without a touch of meretricious sentiment.]

THIS I regret; but another person there was, at that time, whom I have since sought to trace, with far deeper

earnestness, and with far deeper sorrow at my failure. This person was a young woman, and one of that unhappy class who belong to the outcasts and pariahs of our female population. I feel no shame, nor have any reason to feel it, in avowing that I was then on familiar and friendly terms with many women in that unfortunate condition. Smile not, reader too carelessly facile! Frown not, reader too unseasonably austere! Little call was there here either for smiles or frowns. A penniless school-boy could not be supposed to stand within the range of such temptations; besides that, according to the ancient Latin proverb, "*sine Cerere et Baccho*," etc. These unhappy women, to me, were simply sisters in calamity; and sisters amongst whom, in as large measure as amongst any other equal number of persons, commanding more of the world's respect, were to be found humanity, disinterested generosity, courage that would not falter in distress of the helpless, and fidelity that would have scorned to take bribes for betraying. But the truth is, that at no time of my life have I been a person to hold myself polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape. I cannot suppose, I will not believe, that any creatures wearing the form of man or woman are so absolutely rejected and reprobate outcasts, that merely to talk with them inflicts pollution. On the contrary, from my very earliest youth, it has been my pride to converse familiarly, *more Socratico*, with all human beings—man, woman, and child—that chance might fling in my way; for a philosopher should not see with the eyes of the poor liminary creature calling himself a man of the world, filled with narrow and self-regarding prejudices of birth and education, but should look upon himself as a catholic creature, and as standing in an equal relation to high and low, to educated and uneducated, to the guilty and the innocent. Being myself, at that time, of necessity a peripatetic, or a walker of the streets, I naturally fell in more frequently with those female peripatetics who are technically called street-walkers. Some of these women had occasionally taken my part against watchmen who wished to drive me off

the steps of houses where I was sitting; others had protected me against more serious aggressions. But one amongst them—the one on whose account I have at all introduced this subject—yet, no! let me not class thee, O noble-minded Ann —, with that order of women; let me find, if it be possible, some gentler name to designate the condition of her to whose bounty and compassion—ministering to my necessities when all the world stood aloof from me—I owe it that I am at this time alive.

For many weeks I had walked, at nights, with this poor friendless girl up and down Oxford Street, or had rested with her on steps and under the shelter of porticoes. She could not be so old as myself; she told me, indeed, that she had not completed her sixteenth year. By such questions as my interest about her prompted, I had gradually drawn forth her simple history. Here was a case of ordinary occurrence (as I have since had reason to think), and one in which, if London beneficence had better adapted its arrangements to meet it, the power of the law might oftener be interposed to protect and to avenge. But the stream of London charity flows in a channel which, though deep and mighty, is yet noiseless and underground;—not obvious or readily accessible to poor, houseless wanderers; and it cannot be denied that the outside air and framework of society in London, as in all vast capitals, is unavoidably harsh, cruel, and repulsive. In any case, however, I saw that a part of her injuries might have been redressed; and I urged her often and earnestly to lay her complaint before a magistrate. Friendless as she was, I assured her that she would meet with immediate attention; and that English justice, which was no respecter of persons, would speedily and amply avenge her on the brutal ruffian who had plundered her little property. She promised me often that she would; but she delayed taking the steps I pointed out, from time to time; for she was timid and dejected to a degree which showed how deeply sorrow had taken hold of her young heart; and perhaps she thought justly that the most upright judge and the most righteous

tribunals could do nothing to repair her heaviest wrongs. Something, however, would perhaps have been done, for it had been settled between us at length (but, unhappily, on the very last time but one that I was ever to see her), that in a day or two I, accompanied by her, should state her case to a magistrate. This little service it was destined, however, that I should never realise. Meantime, that which she rendered to me, and which was greater than I could ever have repaid her, was this. One night, when we were pacing slowly along Oxford Street, and after a day when I had felt unusually ill and faint, I requested her to turn off with me into Soho Square. Thither we went; and we sat down on the steps of a house, which to this hour I never pass without a pang of grief, and an inner act of homage to the spirit of that unhappy girl, in memory of the noble act which she there performed. Suddenly, as we sat, I grew much worse. I had been leaning my head against her bosom, and all at once I sank from her arms, and fell backwards on the steps. From the sensations I then had, I felt an inner conviction of the liveliest kind, that, without some powerful and reviving stimulus, I should either have died on the spot, or should, at least, have sunk to a point of exhaustion from which all re-ascent, under my friendless circumstances, would soon have become hopeless. Then it was, at this crisis of my fate, that my poor orphan companion, who had herself met with little but injuries in this world, stretched out a saving hand to me. Uttering a cry of terror, but without a moment's delay, she ran off into Oxford Street, and, in less time than could be imagined, returned to me with a glass of port-wine and spices, that acted upon my empty stomach (which at that time would have rejected all solid food) with an instantaneous power of restoration; and for this glass the generous girl, without a murmur, paid out of her own humble purse, at a time, be it remembered, when she had scarcely wherewithal to purchase the bare necessaries of life, and when she could have no reason to expect that I should ever be able to reimburse her. O youthful benefactress! how often in succeeding years,

standing in solitary places, and thinking of thee with grief of heart and perfect love—how often have I wished that, as in ancient times the curse of a father was believed to have a supernatural power, and to pursue its object with a fatal necessity of self-fulfilment, even so the benediction of a heart oppressed with gratitude might have a like prerogative; might have power given it from above to chase, to haunt, to waylay, to pursue thee into the central darkness of a London brothel, or (if it were possible) even into the darkness of the grave, there to awaken thee with an authentic message of peace and forgiveness, and of final reconciliation!

Some feelings, though not deeper or more passionate, are more tender than others; and often when I walk, at this time, in Oxford Street by dreamy lamp-light, and hear those airs played on a common street-organ which years ago solaced me and my dear youthful companion, I shed tears, and muse with myself at the mysterious dispensation which so suddenly and so critically separated us for ever. How it happened, the reader will understand from what remains of this introductory narration.

Soon after the period of the last incident I have recorded, I met in Albemarle Street a gentleman of his late Majesty's household. This gentleman had received hospitalities, on different occasions, from my family; and he challenged me upon the strength of my family likeness. I did not attempt any disguise, but answered his questions ingenuously; and, on his pledging his word of honour that he would not betray me to my guardians, I gave him my real address in Greek Street. The next day I received from him a ten-pound bank-note. The letter enclosing it was delivered, with other letters of business, to the attorney; but, though his look and manner informed me that he suspected its contents, he gave it up to me honourably, and without demur.

This present, from the particular service to which much of it was applied, leads me naturally to speak again of the original purpose which had allured me up to London, and which I had been without intermission prosecuting

through Mr. Brunell from the first day of my arrival in London.

In so mighty a world as London, it will surprise my readers that I should not have found some means of staving off the last extremities of penury; and it will strike them that two resources, at least, must have been open to me—viz., either to seek assistance from the friends of my family, or to turn my youthful accomplishments, such as they were, into some channel of pecuniary emolument. As to the first course, I may observe, generally, that what I dreaded beyond all other evils was the chance of being reclaimed by my guardians, not doubting that whatever power the law gave them would have been enforced against me to the utmost; that is, to the extremity of forcibly restoring me to the school which I had quitted; a restoration which, as it would, in my eyes, have been a dishonour, even if submitted to voluntarily, could not fail, when extorted from me in contempt and defiance of my own known wishes and earnest resistance, to have proved a humiliation worse to me than death, and which would, indeed, have terminated in death. I was, therefore, shy enough of applying for assistance even in those quarters where I was sure of receiving it, if at any risk of furnishing my guardians with a clue for tracing me. My father's friends, no doubt, had been many, and were scattered all over the kingdom; but, as to London in particular, though a large section of these friends would certainly be found there, yet (as full ten years had passed since his death) I knew very few of them even by name; and, never having seen London before—except once, in my fifteenth year, for a few hours—I knew not the address of even those few. To this mode of gaining help, therefore, in part the difficulty, but much more the danger which I have mentioned, habitually indisposed me. In regard to the other mode—that of turning any talents or knowledge that I might possess to a lucrative use—I now feel half inclined to join my reader in wondering that I should have overlooked it. As a corrector of Greek proofs (if in no other way), I might surely have gained enough for my slender

wants. Such an office as this I could have discharged with an exemplary and punctual accuracy that would soon have gained me the confidence of my employers. And there was this great preliminary advantage in giving such a direction to my efforts, that the intellectual dignity and elegance associated with all ministerial services about the press would have saved my pride and self-respect from mortification. In an extreme case, such as mine had now become, I should not have absolutely disdained the humble station of "devil." A subaltern situation in a service inherently honourable is better than a much higher situation in a service pointing to ultimate objects that are mean or ignoble. I am, indeed, not sure that I could adequately have discharged the functions of this office. To the perfection of the diabolic character, I fear that patience is one of the indispensable graces; more, perhaps, than I should be found on trial to possess for dancing attendance upon crochety authors, superstitiously fastidious in matters of punctuation. But why talk of my qualifications? Qualified or not, where could I obtain such an office? For it must not be forgotten that even a diabolic appointment requires interest. Towards *that*, I must first of all have an introduction to some respectable publisher; and this I had no means of obtaining. To say the truth, however, it had never once occurred to me to think of literary labours as a source of profit. No mode sufficiently speedy of obtaining money had ever suggested itself, but that of borrowing it on the strength of my future claims and expectations. This mode I sought by every avenue to compass; and, amongst other persons, I applied to a Jew named D—.

To this Jew, and to other advertising money-lenders, I had introduced myself, with an account of my expectations, which account they had little difficulty in ascertaining to be correct. The person there mentioned as the second son of — was found to have all the claims (or more than all) that I had stated; but one question still remained, which the faces of the Jews pretty significantly suggested—was I that person? This doubt had never

occurred to me as a possible one; I had rather feared, whenever my Jewish friends scrutinised me keenly, that I might be too well known to be that person, and that some scheme might be passing in their minds for entrapping me and selling me to my guardians. It was strange to me to find my own self, *materialiter* considered (so I expressed it, for I doated on logical accuracy of distinctions), suspected of counterfeiting my own self, *formaliter* considered. However, to satisfy their scruples, I took the only course in my power. Whilst I was in Wales, I had received various letters from young friends; these I produced, for I carried them constantly in my pocket. Most of these letters were from the Earl of Altamont, who was at that time, and had been for some years back, amongst my confidential friends. These were dated from Eton. I had also some from the Marquis of Sligo, his father; who, though absorbed in agricultural pursuits, yet, having been an Etonian himself, and as good a scholar as a nobleman needs to be, still retained an affection for classical studies and for youthful scholars. He had, accordingly, from the time that I was fifteen, corresponded with me—sometimes upon the great improvements which he had made, or was meditating, in the counties of Mayo and Sligo, since I had been there; sometimes upon the merits of a Latin poet; at other times, suggesting subjects on which he fancied that I could write verses myself, or breathe poetic inspiration into the mind of my once familiar companion, his son.

On reading the letters, one of my Jewish friends agreed to furnish two or three hundred pounds on my personal security, provided I could persuade the young earl—who was, by the way, not older than myself—to guarantee the payment on our joint coming of age; the Jew's final object being, as I now suppose, not the trifling profit he could expect to make by me, but the prospect of establishing a connection with my noble friend, whose great expectations were well known to him. In pursuance of this proposal on the part of the Jew, about eight or nine days after I had received the £10, I prepared to visit Eton. Nearly three guineas of the money I had given to

my money-lending friend in the background; or, more accurately, I had given that sum to Mr. Brunell, *alias* Brown, as representing Mr. Dell, the Jew; and a smaller sum I had given directly to himself, on his own separate account. What he alleged in excuse for thus draining my purse at so critical a moment was, that stamps must be bought, in order that the writings might be prepared whilst I was away from London. I thought in my heart that he was lying, but I did not wish to give him any excuse for charging his own delays upon me. About fifteen shillings I had employed in re-establishing—(though in a very humble way) my dress. Of the remainder, I gave one quarter (something more than a guinea) to Ann, meaning, on my return, to have divided with her whatever might remain. These arrangements made, soon after six o'clock, on a dark winter evening, I set off, accompanied by Ann, towards Piccadilly, for it was my intention to go down as far as the turn to Salt Hill and Slough on the Bath or Bristol mail. Our course lay through a part of the town which has now totally disappeared, so that I can no longer retrace its ancient boundaries—having been replaced by Regent Street and its adjacencies. *Swallow Street* is all that I remember of the names superseded by this large revolutionary usurpation. Having time enough before us, however, we bore away to the left, until we came into Golden Square; there, near the corner of Sherrard Street, we sat down, not wishing to part in the tumult and blaze of Piccadilly. I had told Ann of my plans some time before, and now I assured her again that she should share in my good fortune, if I met with any, and that I would never forsake her, as soon as I had power to protect her. This I fully intended, as much from inclination as from a sense of duty; for, setting aside gratitude (which in any case must have made me her debtor for life), I loved her as affectionately as if she had been my sister; and at this moment with sevenfold tenderness, from pity at witnessing her extreme dejection. I had apparently most reason for dejection, because I was leaving the saviour of my life, yet I, con-

sidering the shock my health had received, was cheerful and full of hope. She, on the contrary, who was parting with one who had little means of serving her, except by kindness and brotherly treatment, was overcome by sorrow, so that, when I kissed her at our final farewell, she put her arms about my neck, and wept, without speaking a word. I hoped to return in a week, at furthest, and I agreed with her that, on the fifth night from that, and every night afterwards, she should wait for me, at six o'clock, near the bottom of Great Titchfield Street, which had formerly been our customary haven of rendezvous, to prevent our missing each other in the great Mediterranean of Oxford Street. This and other measures of precaution I took; one, only, I forgot. She had either never told me, or (as a matter of no great interest) I had forgotten, her surname. It is a general practice, indeed, with girls of humble rank in her unhappy condition, not (as novel-reading women of higher pretensions) to style themselves *Miss Douglas*, *Miss Montague*, etc., but simply by their Christian names—*Mary*, *Jane*, *Frances*, etc. Her surname, as the surest means of tracing her, I ought now to have inquired; but the truth is, having no reason to think that our meeting again could, in consequence of a short interruption, be more difficult or uncertain than it had been for so many weeks, I scarcely for a moment adverted to it as necessary, or placed it amongst my memoranda against this parting interview; and my final anxieties being spent in comforting her with hopes, and in pressing upon her the necessity of getting some medicine for a violent cough with which she was troubled, I wholly forgot this precaution until it was too late to recall her.

* * * * *

I returned in a Windsor coach to London three days after I had quitted it. And now I come to the end of my story. The Jews did not approve of Lord Desert's conditions, or so they said; whether they would in the end have acceded to them, and were only seeking time for making further inquiries, I know not; but many

delays were made—time passed on—the small fragment of my bank-note had just melted away, and before any conclusion could have been put to the business, I must have relapsed into my former state of wretchedness. Suddenly, at this crisis an opening was made, almost by accident, for reconciliation with my guardians. I quitted London in haste, and returned to the Priory; after some time, I proceeded to Oxford; and it was not until many months had passed away that I had it in my power again to revisit the ground which had become so interesting to me, and to this day remains so, as the chief scene of my youthful sufferings.

Meantime, what had become of Ann? Where was she? Whither had she gone? According to our agreement, I sought her daily, and waited for her every night, so long as I staid in London, at the corner of Titchfield Street; and during the last days of my stay in London I put into activity every means of tracing her that my knowledge of London suggested, and the limited extent of my power made possible. The street where she had lodged I knew, but not the house; and I remembered, at last, some account which she had given of ill-treatment from her landlord, which made it probable that she had quitted those lodgings before we parted. She had few acquaintance; most people, besides, thought that the earnestness of my inquiries arose from motives which moved their laughter or their slight regard; and others, thinking that I was in chase of a girl who had robbed me of some trifles, were naturally and excusably indisposed to give me any clue to her, if, indeed, they had any to give. Finally, as my despairing resource, on the day I left London I put into the hands of the only person who (I was sure) must know Ann by sight, from having been in company with us once or twice, an address to the Priory. All was in vain. To this hour I have never heard a syllable about her. This, amongst such troubles as most men meet with in this life, has been my heaviest affliction. If she lived, doubtless we must have been sometimes in search of each other, at the very same moment, through the mighty

labyrinths of London; perhaps even within a few feet of each other—a barrier no wider, in a London street, often amounting in the end to a separation for eternity! During some years I hoped that she *did* live; and I suppose that, in the literal and unrheterical use of the word *myriad*, I must, on my different visits to London, have looked into many myriads of female faces in the hope of meeting Ann. I should know her again amongst a thousand, and if seen but for a moment. Handsome she was not; but she had a sweet expression of countenance, and a peculiarly graceful carriage of the head. I sought her, I have said, in hope. So it was for years; but now I should fear to see her, and her cough, which grieved me when I parted with her, is now my consolation. Now I wish to see her no longer, but think of her more gladly, as one long since laid in the grave—in the grave, I would hope, of a Magdalen; taken away before injuries and cruelty had blotted out and transfigured her ingenuous nature, or the brutalities of ruffians had completed the ruin they had begun.

* * * * *

So then, Oxford Street, stony-hearted stepmother, thou that listenest to the sighs of orphans, and drinkest the tears of children, at length I was dismissed from thee! The time was come that I no more should pace in anguish thy never-ending terraces; no more should wake and dream in captivity to the pangs of hunger. Successors too many to myself and Ann have, doubtless, since then trodden in our footsteps, inheritors of our calamities. Other orphans than Ann have sighed; tears have been shed by other children; and thou, Oxford Street, hast since those days echoed to the groans of innumerable hearts. For myself, however, the storm which I had outlived seemed to have been the pledge of a long fair weather; the premature sufferings which I had paid down, to have been accepted as a ransom for many years to come, as a price of long immunity from sorrow; and if again I walked in London, a solitary and contemplative man (as oftentimes I did), I walked for

the most part in serenity and peace of mind. And, although it is true that the calamities of my novitiate in London had struck root so deeply in my bodily constitution, that afterwards they shot up and flourished afresh, and grew into a noxious umbrage that has overshadowed and darkened my latter years, yet these second assaults of suffering were met with a fortitude more confirmed, with the resources of a maturer intellect, and with alleviations, how deep! from sympathising affection.

Thus, however, with whatsoever alleviations, years far asunder were bound together by subtle links of suffering derived from a common root. And herein I notice the short-sightedness of human desires—that oftentimes, on moonlight nights, during my first mournful abode in London, my consolation was (if such it could be thought) to gaze from Oxford Street up every avenue in succession which pierces northwards through the heart of Marylebone to the fields and the woods; for *that*, said I, travelling with my eyes up the long vistas which lay part in light and part in shade—“*that* is the road to the north, and, therefore, to Grasmere” (upon which, though as yet unknown to me, I had a presentiment that I should fix my choice for a residence); “and, if I had the wings of a dove, *that* way I would fly for rest.” Thus I said, and thus I wished in my blindness; yet, even in that very northern region it was, in that very valley to which my erroneous wishes pointed, that this second birth of my sufferings began, and that they again threatened to besiege the citadel of life and hope. There it was that for years I was persecuted by visions as ugly, and by phantoms as ghastly, as ever haunted the couch of Orestes; and in this unhappier than he—that sleep, which comes to all as a respite and a restoration, and to him especially as a blessed balm for his wounded heart and his haunted brain, visited me as my bitterest scourge. Thus blind was I in my desires. And yet, if a veil interposes between the dim-sightedness of man and his future calamities, the same veil hides from him their alleviations; and a grief which had not been

feared is met by consolations which had not been hoped. I, therefore, who participated, as it were, in the troubles of Orestes (excepting only in his agitated conscience), participated no less in all his supports; my Eumenides, like his, were at my bed-feet, and stared in upon me through the curtains; but, watching by my pillow, or defrauding herself of sleep to bear me company through the heavy watches of the night, sat my Electra; for thou, beloved M——,¹ dear companion of my later years, thou wast my Electra! and neither in nobility of mind nor in long-suffering affection wouldst permit that a Grecian sister should excel an English wife. For thou thoughtest not much to stoop to humble offices of kindness, and to servile ministrations of tenderest affection; to wipe away for years the unwholesome dew upon the forehead, or to refresh the lips when parched and baked with fever; nor even when thy own peaceful slumbers had by long sympathy become infected with the spectacle of my dread contest with phantoms and shadowy enemies, that oftentimes bade me “sleep no more!”—not even then didst thou utter a complaint or any murmur, nor withdraw thy angelic smiles, nor shrink from thy service of love, more than Electra did of old. For she, too, though she was a Grecian woman, and the daughter of the king of men,² yet wept sometimes, and hid her face³ in her robe.

¹ [Margaret, De Quincey's wife, who was at the Grasmere home while the *Confessions* were being written in a back room of Mr. H. G. Bohn's premises, No. 4, York Street, Covent Garden.—L.]

² Agamemnon—*ἀναξ ἀνδρῶν*.

³ *Ὀμμα θεῖς' εἰς πέπλον*.—The scholar will know that throughout this passage I refer to the early scenes of the *Orestes*, one of the most beautiful exhibitions of the domestic affections which even the dramas of Euripides can furnish. To the unlearned reader, it may be necessary to say that the situation at the opening of the drama is that of a brother attended only by his sister during the demoniacal possession of a suffering conscience (or, in the mythology of the play, haunted by the Furies), under circumstances of immediate danger from enemies, and of desertion or cold regard from nominal friends.

THE PLEASURES OF OPIUM

[In Part II of the *Confessions* De Quincey describes his experiences with the drug during the year after he had left London and Oxford and settled down in the Lake Country. From 1809, when he was twenty-four, to 1816, he lived at Grasmere in Wordsworth's old cottage, as a bachelor; and from 1816 to 1821 as a married man. During the first part of this period he was in comfortable circumstances; but soon after his marriage he met with the reverse of fortune which eventually compelled him to rely upon his pen for a great part of his livelihood.]

It is very long since I first took opium; so long that, if it had been a trifling incident in my life, I might have forgotten its date; but cardinal events are not to be forgotten; and, from circumstances connected with it, I remember that this inauguration into the use of opium must be referred to the spring or to the autumn of 1804; during which seasons I was in London, having come thither for the first time since my entrance at Oxford. And this event arose in the following way: from an early age I had been accustomed to wash my head in cold water at least once a day; being suddenly seized with toothache, I attributed it to some relaxation caused by the casual intermission of that practice; jumped out of bed, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and with hair thus wetted went to sleep. The next morning, as I need hardly say, I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day I think it was, and on a Sunday, that I went out into the streets; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose of relief. By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain! I had heard of it as I had heard of manna or of ambrosia, but no further. How unmeaning a sound was opium at that time! What solemn chords does it now strike upon my heart! What heart-quaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances!

Reverting for a moment to these, I feel a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances connected with the place, and the time, and the man (if man he was) that first laid open to me the paradise of opium-eaters.

It was a Sunday afternoon, wet and cheerless; and a duller spectacle this earth of ours has not to show than a rainy Sunday in London. My road homewards lay through Oxford Street; and near "the *stately* Pantheon" (as Mr. Wordsworth has obligingly called it) I saw a druggist's shop. The druggist (unconscious minister of celestial pleasures!), as if in sympathy with the rainy Sunday, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a rainy London Sunday; and when I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any other man might do, and, furthermore, out of my shilling returned to me what seemed to be real copper half-pence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all such indications of humanity, he has ever since figured in my mind as a beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself. And it confirms me in this way of considering him, that when I next came up to London, I sought him near the stately Pantheon, and found him not; and thus to me, who knew not his name (if, indeed, he had one), he seemed rather to have vanished from Oxford Street, than to have flitted into any other locality, or (which some abominable man suggested) to have absconded from the rent. The reader may choose to think of him as, possibly, no more than a sublunary druggist; it may be so, but my faith is better. I believe him to have evanesced.¹ So unwillingly would I connect any

¹ "*Evanesced*:"—This way of going off from the stage of life appears to have been well known in the seventeenth century, but at that time to have been considered a peculiar privilege of royalty, and by no means open to the use of druggists. For, about the year 1686, a poet of rather ominous name (and who, apparently, did justice to his name)—viz., Mr. FLATMAN—in speaking of the death of Charles II, expressed his surprise that any prince should commit so vulgar an act as dying; because, says he,

"Kings should disdain to die, and only *disappear*."

mortal remembrances with that hour, and place, and creature that first brought me acquainted with the celestial drug.

Arrived at my lodgings, it may be supposed that I lost not a moment in taking the quantity prescribed. I was necessarily ignorant of the whole art and mystery of opium-taking, and what I took, I took under every disadvantage. But I took it; and in an hour, O heavens! what a revulsion! what a resurrection, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished, was now a trifle in my eyes; this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me, in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea, a *φάρμακον νηπενθές* for all human woes; here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered; happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat-pocket; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint-bottle, and peace of mind could be sent down by the mail.

And, first, one word with respect to its bodily effects; for upon all that has been hitherto written on the subject of opium, whether by travellers in Turkey (who may plead their privilege of lying as an old immemorial right), or by professors of medicine writing *ex cathedrâ*, I have but one emphatic criticism to pronounce—Nonsense! I remember once, in passing a bookstall, to have caught these words from a page of some satiric author—“By this time I became convinced that the London newspapers spoke truth at least twice a week—viz., on Tuesday and Saturday¹—and might safely be depended upon for—the list of bankrupts.” In like manner, I do by no means deny that some truths have been delivered to the world in regard to opium; thus, it has been repeatedly affirmed by the learned that opium is a

¹ “*Tuesday and Saturday*:”—viz., the two days on which the *Gazette* is (or used to be) published.

tawny brown in colour—and this, take notice, I grant; secondly, that it is rather dear, which also I grant, for in my time, East India opium has been three guineas a pound, and Turkey eight; and, thirdly, that, if you eat a good deal of it, most probably you must do what is disagreeable to any man of regular habits—viz., die. These weighty propositions are, all and singular, true; I cannot gainsay them, and truth ever was, and will be, commendable. But, in these three theorems, I believe we have exhausted the stock of knowledge as yet accumulated by man on the subject of opium. And therefore, worthy doctors, as there seems to be room for further discoveries, stand aside, and allow me to come forward and lecture on this matter.

First, then, it is not so much affirmed as taken for granted, by all who ever mention opium, formally or incidentally, that it does or can produce intoxication. Now, reader, assure yourself, *meo periculo*, that no quantity of opium ever did, or could, intoxicate. As to the tincture of opium (commonly called laudanum), *that* might certainly intoxicate if a man could bear to take enough of it; but why? Because it contains so much proof spirits of wine, and not because it contains so much opium. But crude opium, I affirm peremptorily, is incapable of producing any state of body at all resembling that which is produced by alcohol, and not in *degree* only incapable, but even in *kind*; it is not in the quantity of its effects merely, but in the quality, that it differs altogether. The pleasure given by wine is always rapidly mounting, and tending to a crisis, after which as rapidly it declines; that from opium, when once generated, is stationary for eight or ten hours: the first, to borrow a technical distinction from medicine, is a case of acute, the second of chronic, pleasure; the one is a flickering flame, the other a steady and equable glow. But the main distinction lies in this—that, whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary (if taken in proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession; opium sustains

and reinforces it. Wine unsettles the judgment, and gives a preternatural brightness and a vivid exaltation to the contempts and the admirations, to the loves and the hatreds, of the drinker; opium, on the contrary, communicates serenity and equipoise to all the faculties, active or passive; and, with respect to the temper and moral feelings in general, it gives simply that sort of vital warmth which is approved by the judgment, and which would probably always accompany a bodily constitution of primeval or antediluvian health. Thus, for instance, opium, like wine, gives an expansion to the heart and the benevolent affections; but, then, with this remarkable difference—that, in the sudden development of kindheartedness which accompanies inebriation, there is always more or less of a maudlin and a transitory character, which exposes it to the contempt of the bystander. Men shake hands, swear eternal friendship, and shed tears—no mortal knows why; and the animal nature is clearly uppermost. But the expansion of the benigner feelings incident to opium is no febrile access, no fugitive paroxysm; it is a healthy restoration to that state which the mind would naturally recover upon the removal of any deep-seated irritation from pain that had disturbed and quarrelled with the impulses of a heart originally just and good. True it is, that even wine up to a certain point, and with certain men, rather tends to exalt and to steady the intellect; I myself, who have never been a great wine-drinker, used to find that half-a-dozen glasses of wine advantageously affected the faculties, brightened and intensified the consciousness, and gave to the mind a feeling of being “*ponderibus librata suis*,” and certainly it is most absurdly said, in popular language, of any man—that he is *disguised* in liquor; for, on the contrary, most men are disguised by sobriety, and exceedingly disguised; and it is when they are drinking that men display themselves in their true complexion of character; which surely is not disguising themselves. But still, wine constantly leads a man to the brink of absurdity and extravagance; and, beyond a certain point, it is sure to volatilise and to disperse the

intellectual energies; whereas opium always seems to compose what had been agitated, and to concentrate what had been distracted. In short, to sum up all in one word, a man who is inebriated, or tending to inebriation, is, and feels that he is, in a condition which calls up into supremacy the merely human, too often the brutal, part of his nature; but the opium-eater (I speak of him simply *as* such, and assume that he is in a normal state of health) feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount—that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and high over all the great light of the majestic intellect.

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Having dwelt so much on this first and leading error in respect to opium, I shall notice briefly a second and a third; which are, that the elevation of spirits produced by opium is necessarily followed by a proportionate depression, and that the natural and even immediate consequence of opium is torpor and stagnation, animal as well as mental. The first of these errors I shall content myself with simply denying: assuring my reader that, for ten years, during which I took opium, not regularly, but intermittingly, the day succeeding to that on which I allowed myself this luxury was always a day of unusually good spirits.

With respect to the torpor supposed to follow, or rather (if we were to credit the numerous pictures of Turkish opium-eaters) to accompany, the practice of opium-eating, I deny that also. Certainly, opium is classed under the head of narcotics, and some such effect it may produce in the end; but the primary effects of opium are always, and in the highest degree, to excite and stimulate the system. This first stage of its action always lasted with me, during my novitiate, for upwards of eight hours; so that it must be the fault of the opium-eater himself if he does not so time his exhibition of the dose, as that the whole weight of its narcotic influence may descend upon his sleep. Turkish opium-eaters, it

seems, are absurd enough to sit, like so many equestrian statues, on logs of wood as stupid as themselves. But, that the reader may judge of the degree in which opium is likely to stupefy the faculties of an Englishman, I shall (by way of treating the question illustratively, rather than argumentatively) describe the way in which I myself often passed an opium evening in London, during the period between 1804 and 1812. It will be seen that at least opium did not move me to seek solitude, and much less to seek inactivity, or the torpid state of self-involution ascribed to the Turks. I give this account at the risk of being pronounced a crazy enthusiast or visionary; but I regard that little. I must desire my reader to bear in mind that I was a hard student, and at severe studies for all the rest of my time; and certainly I had a right occasionally to relaxations as well as other people.

THE KEYS OF PARADISE

[In the following pages De Quincey deals with his drug-taking and other pursuits and pleasures during the period immediately succeeding his residence at Oxford, which terminated in 1807. In that and the following year he was mostly in London, sauntering and reading and seeing something of Lamb and Hazlitt and other literary persons.]

THE late Duke of Norfolk used to say, "Next Monday, wind and weather permitting, I purpose to be drunk"; and in like manner I used to fix beforehand how often within a given time, when, and with what accessory circumstances of festal joy, I would commit a debauch of opium. This was seldom more than once in three weeks; for at that time I could not have ventured to call every day (as afterwards I did) for "*a glass of laudanum negus, warm, and without sugar.*" No; once in three weeks sufficed; and the time selected was either a Tuesday or a Saturday night; my reason for which was this:—Tuesday and Saturday were for many years the regular nights of performance at the King's Theatre

(or Opera House); and there it was in those times that Grassini sang; and her voice (the richest of *contraltos*) was delightful to me beyond all that I had ever heard. Yes, or have since heard; or ever shall hear. I know not what may be the state of the opera-house now, having never been within its walls for seven or eight years; but at that time it was by much the most pleasant place of resort in London for passing an evening.¹ Half-a-guinea admitted you to the pit, under the troublesome condition, however, of being *en grande tenue*. But to the gallery five shillings admitted you; and that gallery was subject to far less annoyance than the pit of most theatres. The orchestra was distinguished by its sweet and melodious grandeur from all English orchestras; the composition of which, I confess, is not acceptable to my ear, from the predominance of the clangorous instruments, and in some instances from the tyranny of the violin. Thrilling was the pleasure with which almost always I heard this angelic Grassini. Shivering with expectation I sat, when the time drew near for her golden epiphany; shivering I rose from my seat, incapable of rest, when that heavenly and harp-like voice sang its own victorious welcome in its prelusive *threttánelo* — *threttánelo*² (θρεττάνελω — θρεττάνελω). The choruses were divine to hear; and, when Grassini appeared in some interlude, as she often did, and poured

¹ I trust that my reader has not been so inattentive to the windings of my narrative as to fancy me speaking here of the Brown-Brunell and Pymont period. Naturally I had no money disposable at that period for the opera. I am speaking here of years stretching far beyond those boyish scenes—interludes in my Oxford life, or long after Oxford.

² "*Threttánelo—threttánelo*:"—The beautiful representative echo by which Aristophanes expresses the sound of the Grecian *phorminx*, or of some other instrument, which conjecturally has been shown most to resemble our modern European harp. In the case of ancient Hebrew instruments used in the Temple service, random and idle must be all the guesses through the Greek Septuagint or the Latin Vulgate to identify any one of them. But as to Grecian instruments the case is different; always there is a remote chance of digging up some marble sculpture of orchestral appurtenances and properties.

forth her passionate soul as Andromache at the tomb of Hector, etc., I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But, indeed, I honour the barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman. For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it. And, by the bye, with the exception of the fine extravaganza on that subject in *Twelfth Night*, I do not recollect more than one thing said adequately on the subject of music in all literature; it is a passage in the *Religio Medici* of Sir T. Browne, and, though chiefly remarkable for its sublimity, has also a philosophic value, inasmuch as it points to the true theory of musical effects.

The mistake of most people is to suppose that it is by the ear they communicate with music, and therefore that they are purely passive as to its effects. But this is not so; it is by the reaction of the mind upon the notices of the ear (the *matter* coming by the senses, the *form* from the mind) that the pleasure is constructed; and therefore it is that people of equally good ear differ so much in this point from one another. Now opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind, generally increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure. But, says a friend, a succession of musical sounds is to me like a collection of Arabic characters: I can attach no ideas to them. Ideas! my dear friend! there is no occasion for them; all that class of ideas which can be available in such a case has a language of representative feelings. But this is a subject foreign to my present purposes; it is sufficient to say that a chorus, etc., of elaborate harmony displayed before me, as in a piece of arras-work, the whole of my past life—not as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music; no longer painful to dwell upon, but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction, and its passions ex-

alted, spiritualised, and sublimed. All this was to be had for five shillings—that being the price of admission to the gallery; or, if a man preferred the high-bred society of the pit, even this might be had for half-a-guinea; or, in fact, for half-a-crown less, by purchasing beforehand a ticket at the music shops. And over and above the music of the stage and the orchestra, I had all around me, in the intervals of the performance, the music of the Italian language talked by Italian women—for the gallery was usually crowded with Italians—and I listened with a pleasure such as that with which Weld, the traveller, lay and listened, in Canada, to the sweet laughter of Indian women; for, the less you understand of a language, the more sensible you are to the melody or harshness of its sounds. For such a purpose, therefore, it was an advantage to me that in those days I was a poor Italian scholar, reading it but little and not speaking it at all, nor understanding a tenth part of what I heard spoken.

These were my opera pleasures; but another pleasure I had, which, as it could be had only on a Saturday night, occasionally struggled with my love of the opera; for, in those years, Tuesday and Saturday were the regular opera nights. On this subject I am afraid I shall be rather obscure, but, I can assure the reader, not at all more so than Marinus in his life of Proclus, or many other biographers and autobiographers of fair reputation. This pleasure, I have said, was to be had only on a Saturday night. What, then, was Saturday night to me more than any other night? I had no labours that I rested from; no wages to receive; what needed I to care for Saturday night, more than as it was a summons to hear Grassini? True, most logical reader; what thou sayest is, and ever will be, unanswerable. And yet so it was, that, whereas different men throw their feelings into different channels, and most men are apt to show their interest in the concerns of the poor chiefly by sympathy with their distresses and sorrows, I at that time was disposed to express mine by sympathising with their pleasures. The pains of poverty I had lately seen too

much of—more than I wished to remember; but the pleasures of the poor, their hopes, their consolations of spirit, and their restings from toil, can never become oppressive to contemplate. Now, Saturday night is the season for the chief regular and periodic return of rest to the poor, and to all that live by bodily labour; in this point the most hostile sects unite, and acknowledge a common link of brotherhood; almost all Christendom rests from its labours. It is a rest introductory to an other rest; and divided by a whole day and two nights from the renewal of toil. On this account I feel always, on a Saturday night, as though I also were released from some yoke of bondage, had some wages to receive, and some luxury of repose to enjoy. For the sake, therefore, of witnessing, upon as large a scale as possible, a spectacle with which my sympathy was so entire, I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, whither the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages. Many a family party, consisting of a man, his wife, and sometimes one or two of their children, have I listened to, as they stood consulting on their ways and means, or the strength of their exchequer, or the price of household articles. Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. Sometimes there might be heard murmurs of discontent; but far oftener expressions on the countenance, or uttered in words, of patience, of hope, and of reconciliation to their lot. Generally speaking, the impression left upon my mind was, that the poor are practically more philosophic than the rich; that they show a more ready and cheerful submission to what they consider as irremediable evils or irreparable losses. Whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without appearing to be intrusive, I joined their parties, and gave my opinion upon the matter in discussion, which, if not always judicious, was always received indulgently. If wages were a little higher, or were expected to be so—if the quartern loaf were a little lower, or it was reported

that onions and butter were falling, I was glad; yet, if the contrary were true, I drew from opium some means of consolation. For opium (like the bee, that extracts its materials indiscriminately from roses and from the soot¹ of chimneys) can overrule all feelings into a compliance with the master-key.

Some of these rambles led me to great distances; for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes, in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, alleys without soundings, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets, without obvious outlets or thoroughfares, as must baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney coachmen. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. Positively, in one line of communication to the south of Holborn, for foot-passengers (known, I doubt not, to many of my London readers), the road lay through a man's kitchen; and, as it was a small kitchen, you needed to steer cautiously, or else you might run foul of the dripping-pan. For all this, however, I paid a heavy price in distant years, when the human face tyrannised over my dreams, and the perplexities of my steps in London came back and haunted my sleep, with the feeling of perplexities moral or intellectual, that brought confusion to the reason, that brought anguish and remorse to the conscience.

¹ "Soot:"—In the large capacious chimneys of the rustic cottages throughout the Lake district, you can see up the entire cavity from the seat which you occupy, as an honoured visitor, in the chimney corner. There I used often to hear (though not to see) bees. Their murmuring was audible, though their bodily forms were too small to be visible at that altitude. On inquiry, I found that soot (chiefly from wood and peats) was useful in some stage of their wax or honey manufacture.

Thus I have shown, or tried to show, that opium does not of necessity produce inactivity or torpor; but that, on the contrary, it often led me into markets and theatres. Yet, in candour, I will admit that markets and theatres are not the appropriate haunts of the opium-eater, when in the divinest state incident to his enjoyment. In that state crowds become an oppression to him; music, even, too sensual and gross. He naturally seeks solitude and silence as indispensable conditions of those trances, or profoundest reveries, which are the crown and consummation of what opium can do for human nature. I, whose disease it was to meditate too much and to observe too little, and who, upon my first entrance at college, was nearly falling into a deep melancholy, from brooding too much on the sufferings which I had witnessed in London, was sufficiently aware of these tendencies in my own thoughts to do all I could to counteract them. I was, indeed, like a person who, according to the old Pagan legend, had entered the cave of Trophonius; and the remedies I sought were to force myself into society, and to keep my understanding in continual activity upon subtleties of philosophic speculation. But for these remedies, I should certainly have become hypochondriacally melancholy. In after years, however, when my cheerfulness was more fully re-established, I yielded to my natural inclination for a solitary life. At that time I often fell into such reveries after taking opium; and many a time it has happened to me on a summer night—when I have been seated at an open window, from which I could overlook the sea at a mile below me, and could at the same time command a view of some great town standing on a different radius of my circular prospect, but at nearly the same distance—that from sunsét to sunrise, all through the hours of night, I have continued motionless, as if frozen, without consciousness of myself as of an object anywise distinct from the multiform scene which I contemplated from above. Such a scene in all its elements was not unfrequently realised for me on the gentle eminence of Everton. Obliquely to the left lay the many-linguaged town of

Liverpool; obliquely to the right, the multitudinous sea. The scene itself was somewhat typical of what took place in such a reverie. The town of Liverpool represented the earth, with its sorrows and its graves left behind, yet not out of sight, nor wholly forgotten. The ocean, in everlasting but gentle agitation, yet brooded over by dove-like calm, might not unfitly typify the mind, and the mood which then swayed it. For it seemed to me as if then first I stood at a distance aloof from the uproar of life; as if the tumult, the fever, and the strife were suspended; a respite were granted from the secret burdens of the heart; some sabbath of repose; some resting from human labours. Here were the hopes which blossom in the paths of life, reconciled with the peace which is in the grave; motions of the intellect as unwearied as the heavens, yet for all anxieties a halcyon calm; tranquillity that seemed no product of inertia, but as if resulting from mighty and equal antagonisms; infinite activities, infinite repose.

O just, subtle, and all-conquering opium! that, to the hearts of rich and poor alike, for the wounds that will never heal, and for the pangs of grief that "tempt the spirit to rebel," bringest an assuaging balm;—eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath, pleadest effectually for relenting pity, and through one night's heavenly sleep callest back to the guilty man the visions of his infancy, and hands washed pure from blood;—O just and righteous opium! that to the chancery of dreams summonest, for the triumphs of despairing innocence, false witnesses; and confoundest perjury; and dost reverse the sentences of unrighteous judges;—thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles—beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatompylos;¹

¹ *I.e.*, the *hundred-gated* (from *ἑκατόν*, *hekatón*, a hundred, and *πόλη*, *phyle*, a gate). This epithet of hundred-gated was applied to the Egyptian Thebes in contradistinction to the *ἑπτάπυλος* (*heptapylos*, or *seven-gated*) which designated the Grecian Thebes, within one day's journey of Athens.

and "from the anarchy of dreaming sleep," callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties, and the blessed household countenances, cleansed from the "dishonours of the grave." Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium!

* * * * *

THE HAPPY VALLEY

[In 1809 De Quincey became the tenant of the little cottage at Townend, Grasmere, which Wordsworth had quitted in 1807. Here the "opium-eater" passed some peaceful and, as he tells us, very happy years; first, as a bachelor, and after 1816 as a married man. His occupations are described in the pleasant pages that follow.]

COURTEOUS, and I hope indulgent reader, having accompanied me thus far, now let me request you to move onwards for about eight years; that is to say, from 1804 (when I said that my acquaintance with opium began) to 1812. The years of academic life are now over and gone—almost forgotten; the student's cap no longer presses my temples; if my cap exists at all, it presses those of some youthful scholar, I trust, as happy as myself, and as passionate a lover of knowledge. My gown is, by this time, I dare to say, in the same condition with many thousands of excellent books in the Bodleian—viz., diligently perused by certain studious moths and worms; or departed, however (which is all that I know of its fate), to that great reservoir of *somewhere*, to which all the tea-cups, tea-caddies, tea-pots, tea-kettles, etc., have departed, which occasional resemblances in the present generation of tea-cups, etc., remind me of having once possessed, but of whose departure and final fate I, in common with most gownsmen of either university, could give but an obscure and conjectural history. The persecutions of the chapel bell, sounding its unwelcome summons to matins, interrupt my slumbers no longer;

the porter who rang it is dead, and has ceased to disturb anybody; and I, with many others who suffered much from his tintinnabulous propensities, have now agreed to overlook his errors, and have forgiven him. Even with the bell I am now in charity; it rings, I suppose, as formerly, thrice a day, and cruelly annoys, I doubt not, many worthy gentlemen and disturbs their peace of mind; but, as to me, in this year 1812, I regard its treacherous voice no longer (treacherous, I call it, for, by some refinement of malice, it spoke in as sweet and silvery tones as if it had been inviting one to a party); its tones have no longer, indeed, power to reach me, let the wind sit as favourably as the malice of the bell itself could wish; for I am two hundred and fifty miles away from it, and buried in the depth of mountains. And what am I doing amongst the mountains? Taking opium. Yes; but what else? Why, reader, in 1812, the year we are now arrived at, as well as for some years previous, I have been chiefly studying German metaphysics, in the writings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, etc.

And how, and in what manner, do I live?—in short, what class or description of men do I belong to? I am at this period—viz., in 1812—living in a cottage; and with a single female servant (*honi soit qui mal y pense*), who, amongst my neighbours, passes by the name of my “housekeeper.” And, as a scholar and a man of learned education, I may presume to class myself as an unworthy member of that indefinite body called *gentlemen*. Partly on the ground I have assigned—partly because, from having no visible calling or business, it is rightly judged that I must be living on my private fortune—I am so classed by my neighbours; and, by the courtesy of modern England, I am usually addressed on letters, etc., *Esquire*, though having, I fear, in the rigorous construction of heralds, antique or antic, dressed like the knaves of spades or diamonds, but slender pretensions to that distinguished honour;—yes, in popular estimation, I am X. Y. Z., Esquire, but not Justice of the Peace nor Custos Rotulorum. Am I married? Not yet. And I still take opium? On Saturday nights. And, perhaps, have

taken it unblushingly ever since "the rainy Sunday," and "the stately Pantheon," and "the beatific druggist" of 1804? Even so. And how do I find my health after all this opium-eating? in short, how do I do? Why, pretty well, thank you, reader. In fact, if I dared to say the real and simple truth (though, in order to satisfy the theories of some medical men, I ought to be ill), I was never better in my life than in the spring of 1812; and I hope sincerely that the quantity of claret, port, or "London particular Madeira," which, in all probability, you, good reader, have taken, and design to take, for every term of eight years during your natural life, may as little disorder your health as mine was disordered by all the opium I had taken (though in quantity such that I might well have bathed and swum in it) for the eight years between 1804 and 1812. Hence you may see again the danger of taking any medical advice from *Anastasius*;¹ in divinity, for anything I know, he may be a safe counsellor, but not in medicine. No; it is far better to consult Dr. Buchan, as I did; for I never forgot that worthy man's excellent suggestion, and I was "particularly careful not to take above five-and-twenty ounces of laudanum."

To this moderation and temperate use of the article I may ascribe it, I suppose, that, as yet at least (that is, in 1812) I am ignorant and unsuspecting of the avenging terrors which opium has in store for those who abuse its long-suffering. At the same time, as yet I had been only a *dilettante* eater of opium; even eight years' practice,

¹ [De Quincey's note to this passage in the Edinburgh edition of his Works is as follows: "The reader of this generation will marvel at these repeated references to *Anastasius*. It is now an almost forgotten book, so vast has been the deluge of novel-writing talent, really original and powerful, which has overflowed our literature during the lapse of thirty-five years from the publication of these Confessions. *Anastasius* was written by the famous and opulent Mr. Hope; and was in 1821 a book both of high reputation and of great influence amongst the leading circles of society." Thomas Hope, a member of a wealthy Amsterdam family, a great virtuoso and collector, published his *Anastasius, or Memoirs of a Modern Greek* in 1819.—L.]

with the single precaution of allowing sufficient intervals between every indulgence, has not been sufficient to make opium necessary to me as an article of daily diet. But now comes a different era. Move on, then, if you please, reader, to 1813. In the summer of the year we have just quitted, I had suffered much in bodily health from distress of mind connected with a melancholy event. This event, being nowise related to the subject now before me, further than through the bodily illness which it produced, I need not more particularly notice.

Whether this illness of 1812 had any share in that of 1813, I know not; but so it was that, in the latter year, I was attacked by a most appalling irritation of the stomach, in all respects the same as that which had caused me so much suffering in youth, and accompanied by a revival of all the old dreams. Now, then, it was—viz., in the year 1813—that I became a regular and confirmed (no longer an intermitting) opium-eater. And here I find myself in a perplexing dilemma. Either, on the one hand, I must exhaust the reader's patience by such a detail of my malady, and of my struggles with it, as might suffice to establish the fact of my inability to wrestle any longer with irritation and constant suffering; or, on the other hand, by passing lightly over this critical part of my story, I must forego the benefit of a stronger impression left on the mind of the reader, and must lay myself open to the misconception of having slipped by the easy and gradual steps of self-indulging persons, from the first to the final stage of opium-eating (a misconception to which there will be a lurking predisposition in most readers, from my previous acknowledgments). This is the dilemma, the first horn of which is not to be thought of. It remains, then, that I *postulate* so much as is necessary for my purpose. And let me take as full credit for this as if I had demonstrated it, good reader, at the expense of your patience and my own. Be not so ungenerous as to let me suffer in your good opinion through my own forbearance and regard for your comfort. No; believe all that I ask of you—viz., that I could resist no longer—believe it liberally, and as an act of grace, or

else in mere prudence; for, if not, then in my next edition I will make you believe and tremble; and, *à force d'ennuyer*, by mere dint of pandiculation, vulgarly called yawning, I will terrify all readers of mine from ever again questioning any postulate that I shall think fit to make.

This, then, let me repeat: I postulate that, at the time I began to take opium daily, I could not have done otherwise. Whether, indeed, afterwards I might not have succeeded in breaking off the habit, even when it seemed to me that all efforts would be unavailing, and whether many of the innumerable efforts which I *did* make might not have been carried much further, and my gradual re-conquests of lost ground might not have been followed up much more energetically—these are questions which I must decline. Perhaps I might make out a case of palliation; but (shall I speak ingenuously?) I confess it, as a besetting infirmity of mine, that I am too much of an Eudaemonist; I hanker too much after a state of happiness, both for myself and others; I cannot face misery, whether my own or not, with an eye of sufficient firmness; and am little capable of encountering present pain for the sake of any reversionary benefit. On some other matters I can agree with the gentlemen of The Porch¹ at Manchester in affecting the Stoic philosophy; but not in this. Here I take the liberty of an Eclectic philosopher, and I look out for some courteous and considerate sect that will condescend more to the infirm condition of an opium-eater; that are pleasant men and courteous, such as Chaucer describes, to hear confession or to give absolution; and will show some conscience in the penances they inflict, or the efforts of abstinence they exact from poor sinners like myself. An inhuman moralist

¹ A handsome news-room, of which I was very courteously made free, in passing through Manchester, by several gentlemen of that place, is called either *The Porch* or *The Portico*, which in Greek is the *Stoa*; from which I, a stranger in Manchester, inferred that the subscribers meant to profess themselves Stoics, or followers of Zeno. But I have been since assured that this is a mistake.

I can no more endure, in my nervous state, than opium that has not been boiled. At any rate, he who summons me to send out a large freight of self-denial and mortification upon any cruising voyage of moral improvement, must make it clear to my understanding that the concern is a hopeful one. At my time of life (six-and-thirty years of age¹), it cannot be supposed that I have much energy to spare; in fact I find it all little enough for the intellectual labours I have on my hands; and, therefore, let no man expect to frighten me, by a few hard words, into embarking any part of it upon desperate adventures of morality.

Desperate or not, however, the issue of the struggle in 1813 was what I have mentioned; and from this date the reader is to consider me as a regular and confirmed opium-eater, of whom to ask whether on any particular day he had or had not taken opium, would be to ask whether his lungs had performed respiration, or the heart fulfilled its functions. Now, then, reader, you understand what I am; and you are by this time aware, that no old gentleman, "with a snow-white beard," will have any chance of persuading me (like Anastasius) to surrender "the little golden receptacle of the pernicious drug." No; I give notice to all, whether moralists or surgeons, that, whatever be their pretensions and skill in their respective lines of practice, they must not hope for any countenance from me, if they think to begin by any savage proposition for a Lent or Ramadan of abstinence from opium. This being fully understood between us, we shall in future sail before the wind; now, then, reader, from the year 1813, where all this time we have been sitting down and loitering, rise up, if you please, walk forward about three years more; draw up the curtain, and you shall see me in a new character.

If any man, poor or rich, were to say that he would tell us what had been the happiest day in his life, and the why and the wherefore, I suppose that we should all cry out, Hear him! hear him! As to the happiest day,

¹ This was written at the time of original publication.

that must be very difficult for any wise man to assign; because any event that could occupy so distinguished a place in a man's retrospect of life, or be entitled to have shed a special, separate, and supreme felicity on any one day, ought to be of such an enduring character as that (accidents apart) it should have continued to shed the same felicity, or one not distinguishably less, on very many years together. To the happiest *lustrum*, however, or even to the happiest *year*, a man may perhaps allowably point without discountenance from wisdom. This year, in *my* case, reader, was the one which we have now reached; though it stood, I confess, as a parenthesis between years of a gloomier character. It was a year of brilliant water (to speak after the manner of jewellers), set, as it were, and insulated, in the gloomy umbrage of opium. Strange as it may sound, I had, a little before this time, descended suddenly, and without any considerable effort, from three hundred and twenty grains of opium (that is, eight¹ thousand drops of laudanum) per day, to forty grains, or one-eighth part. Instantaneously, and as if by magic, the cloud of profoundest melancholy which rested upon my brain, like some black vapours that I have seen roll away from the summit of a mountain, drew off in one week; passed away with its murky banners as simultaneously as a ship that has been stranded, and is floated off by a spring tide,

That moveth altogether, if it move at all.

Now, then, I was again happy; I now took only one

¹ I here reckon twenty-five drops of laudanum as equivalent to one grain of opium, which, I believe, is the common estimate. However, as both may be considered variable quantities (the crude opium varying much in strength, and the tincture still more), I suppose that no infinitesimal accuracy can be had in such a calculation. Tea-spoons vary as much in size as opium in strength. Small ones hold about one hundred drops; so that eight thousand drops, which obviously read into eighty hundred drops, fill a *small* tea-spoon eighty times. But large modern tea-spoons hold very much more. Some even approach in their capacity to dessert-spoons. The reader sees how much I kept within Dr. Buchan's indulgent allowance.

thousand drops of laudanum per day—and what was that? A latter spring had come to close up the season of youth. My brain performed its functions as healthily as ever before. I read Kant again; and again I understood him, or fancied that I did. Again my feelings of pleasure expanded themselves to all around me; and if any man from Oxford or Cambridge, or from neither, had been announced to me in my unpretending cottage, I should have welcomed him with as sumptuous a reception as so poor a man could offer. Whatever else might be wanting to a wise man's happiness, of laudanum I would have given him as much as he wished, and in a silver-gilt, if not golden cup. And, by the way, now that I speak of giving laudanum away, I remember about this time a little incident, which I mention because, trifling as it was, the reader will soon meet it again in my dreams, which it influenced more fearfully than could be imagined. One day a Malay knocked at my door. What business a Malay could have to transact amongst the recesses of English mountains is not my business to conjecture; but possibly he was on his road to a seaport—viz., Whitehaven, Workington, etc.—about forty miles distant.

The servant who opened the door to him was a young girl, born and bred amongst the mountains, who had never seen an Asiatic dress of any sort: his turban, therefore, confounded her not a little; and, as it turned out that *his* knowledge of English was exactly commensurate with *hers* of Malay, there seemed to be an impassable gulf fixed between all communication of ideas, if either party had happened to possess any. In this dilemma, the girl, recollecting the reputed learning of her master (and, doubtless, giving me credit for a knowledge of all the languages of the earth, besides, perhaps, a few of the lunar ones), came and gave me to understand that there was a sort of demon below, whom she clearly imagined that my art could exorcise from the house. The group which presented itself, arranged as it was by accident, though not very elaborate, took hold of my fancy and my eye more powerfully than any of the

statuesque attitudes or groupes exhibited in the ballets at the opera-house, though so ostentatiously complex. In a cottage kitchen, but not looking so much like *that* as a rustic hall of entrance, being panelled on the wall with dark wood, that from age and rubbing resembled oak, stood the Malay, his turban and loose trousers of dingy white relieved upon the dark panelling; he had placed himself nearer to the girl than she seemed to relish, though her native spirit of mountain intrepidity contended with the feeling of simple awe which her countenance expressed, as she gazed upon the tiger-cat before her. A more striking picture there could not be imagined than the beautiful English face of the girl,¹ and its exquisite bloom, together with her erect and independent attitude, contrasted with the sallow and bilious skin of the Malay, veneered with mahogany tints by climate and marine air, his small, fierce, restless eyes, thin lips, slavish gestures and adorations. Half hidden by the ferocious-looking Malay, was a little child from a neighbouring cottage, who had crept in after him, and was now in the act of reverting its head and gazing upwards at the turban and the fiery eyes beneath it, whilst with one hand he caught at the dress of the lovely girl for protection.

¹ This girl, Barbara Lewthwaite, was already at that time a person of some poetic distinction, being (unconsciously to herself) the chief speaker in a little pastoral poem of Wordsworth's. That she was really beautiful, and not merely so described by me for the sake of improving the picturesque effect, the reader will judge from this line in the poem, written, perhaps, ten years earlier, when Barbara might be six years old:

'Twas little Barbara Lewthwaite, a child of beauty rare!

This, coming from William Wordsworth, both a fastidious judge and a truth-speaker of the severest literality, argues some real pretensions to beauty, or real at that time. But it is notorious that, in the anthologies of earth through all her zones, one flower beyond every other is liable to change, which flower is the countenance of woman. Whether in his fine stanzas upon "Mutability," where the most pathetic instances of this earthly doom are solemnly arrayed, Spenser has dealt sufficiently upon this, the saddest of all, I do not remember.

My knowledge of the oriental tongues is not remarkably extensive, being, indeed, confined to two words—the Arabic word for barley, and the Turkish for opium (*madjoon*), which I have learned from *Anastasius*. And, as I had neither a Malay dictionary, nor even Adelung's *Mithridates*, which might have helped me to a few words, I addressed him in some lines from the *Iliad*, considering that, of such languages as I possessed, the Greek, in point of longitude, came geographically nearest to an oriental one. He worshipped me in a devout manner, and replied in what I suppose to have been Malay. In this way I saved my reputation as a linguist with my neighbours; for the Malay had no means of betraying the secret. He lay down upon the floor for about an hour, and then pursued his journey. On his departure I presented him, *inter alia*, with a piece of opium. To him, as a native of the East, I could have no doubt that opium was not less familiar than his daily bread; and the expression of his face convinced me that it was. Nevertheless, I was struck with some little consternation when I saw him suddenly raise his hand to his mouth, and bolt the whole, divided into three pieces, at one mouthful. The quantity was enough to kill some half-dozen dragoons, together with their horses, supposing neither bipeds nor quadrupeds to be regularly trained opium-eaters. I felt some alarm for the poor creature; but what could be done? I had given him the opium in pure compassion for his solitary life, since, if he had travelled on foot from London, it must be nearly three weeks since he could have exchanged a thought with any human being. Ought I to have violated the laws of hospitality by having him seized and drenched with an emetic, thus frightening him into a notion that we were going to sacrifice him to some English idol? No; there was clearly no help for it. The mischief, if any, was done. He took his leave, and for some days I felt anxious; but, as I never heard of any Malay, or of any man in a turban, being found dead on any part of the very slenderly peopled road between Grasmere and Whitehaven, I became satisfied that he was familiar

with opium,¹ and that I must doubtless have done him the service I designed, by giving him one night of respite from the pains of wandering.

This incident I have digressed to mention, because this Malay (partly from the picturesque exhibition he assisted to frame, partly from the anxiety I connected with his image for some days) fastened afterwards upon my fancy, and through *that* upon my dreams, bringing with him other Malays worse than himself, that ran "a-muck"² at me, and led me into a world of nocturnal troubles. But to quit this episode, and to return to my intercalary year of happiness. I have said already that, on a subject so important to us all as happiness, we should listen with pleasure to any man's experience or experiments, even though he were but a ploughboy, who cannot be supposed to have ploughed very deep in such an intractable soil as that of human pains and pleasures, or to have conducted his researches upon any very enlightened principles. But I, who have taken happiness, both in a solid and a liquid shape, both boiled and un-boiled, both East Indian and Turkish—who have conducted my experiments upon this interesting subject with a sort of galvanic battery, and have, for the general benefit of the world, inoculated myself, as it were, with the poison of eight thousand drops of laudanum per day (and for the same reason as a French surgeon inoculated himself lately with a cancer, an English one, twenty years ago, with plague, and a third, who was also English, with hydrophobia), I, it will be admitted, must surely now know what happiness is, if anybody does. And therefore I will here lay down an analysis of happiness;

¹ This, however, is not a necessary conclusion; the varieties of effect produced by opium on different constitutions are infinite. A London magistrate (Harriott's *Struggles through Life*, vol. iii, p. 391, third edition) has recorded that, on the first occasion of his trying laudanum for the gout, he took FORTY drops; the next night SIXTY, and on the fifth night EIGHTY, without any effect whatever; and this at an advanced age.

² See the common accounts, in any eastern traveller or voyager, of the frantic excesses committed by Malays who have taken opium, or are reduced to desperation by ill luck at gambling.

and, as the most interesting mode of communicating it, I will give it, not didactically, but wrapped up and involved in a picture of one evening, as I spent every evening during the intercalary year, when laudanum, though taken daily, was to me no more than the elixir of pleasure.

Let there be a cottage standing in a valley eighteen miles from any town; no spacious valley, but about two miles long by three-quarters-of-a-mile in average width, the benefit of which provision is, that all the families resident within its circuit will compose, as it were, one larger household, personally familiar to your eye, and more or less interesting to your affections. Let the mountains be real mountains, between three and four thousand feet high, and the cottage a real cottage, not (as a witty author has it) "a cottage with a double coach-house;" let it be, in fact (for I must abide by the actual scene), a white cottage, embowered with flowering shrubs, so chosen as to unfold a succession of flowers upon the walls, and clustering around the windows, through all the months of spring, summer, and autumn; beginning, in fact, with May roses, and ending with jasmine. Let it, however, *not* be spring, nor summer, nor autumn; but winter, in its sternest shape. This is a most important point in the science of happiness. And I am surprised to see people overlook it, as if it were actually matter of congratulation that winter is going, or, if coming, is not likely to be a severe one. On the contrary, I put up a petition annually, for as much snow, hail, frost, or storm of one kind or other, as the skies can possibly afford. Surely everybody is aware of the divine pleasures which attend a winter fire side—candles at four o'clock, warm hearth-rugs, tea, a fair tea-maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies on the floor, whilst the wind and rain are raging audibly without,

And at the doors and windows seem to call,
 As heaven and earth they would together melt;
 Yet the least entrance find they none at all;
 Whence sweeter grows our rest secure in massy hall.
Castle of Indolence.

All these are items in the description of a winter evening, which must surely be familiar to everybody born in a high latitude. And it is evident that most of these delicacies cannot be ripened without weather stormy or inclement in some way or other. I am not "*particular*" whether it be snow—or black frost, or wind so strong that (as Mr. Anti-slavery Clarkson says) "you may lean your back against it like a post." I can put up even with rain, provided that it rains cats and dogs, or, as sailors say, "great guns and marline-spikes;" but something of the sort I must have; and if I have it not, I think myself in a manner ill-used: for why am I called on to pay so heavily for winter in coals, candles, etc., if I am not to have the article good of its kind? No: a Canadian winter for my money, or a Russian one, where every man is but a co-proprietor with the north wind in the fee-simple of his own ears. Indeed, so great an epicure am I in this matter, that I cannot relish a winter night fully, if it be much past St. Thomas's Day, and have degenerated into disgusting tendencies towards vernal indications: in fact, it must be divided by a thick wall of dark nights from all return of light and sunshine. Start, therefore, at the first week of November: thence to the end of January, Christmas Eve being the meridian line, you may compute the period when happiness is in season, which, in my judgment, enters the rooms with the tea-tray. For tea, though ridiculed by those who are naturally coarse in their nervous sensibilities, or are become so from wine-drinking, and are not susceptible of influence from so refined a stimulant, will always be the favourite beverage of the intellectual; and, for my part, I would have joined Dr. Johnson in a *bellum internecinum* against Jonas Hanway, or any other impious person who should have presumed to disparage it. But here, to save myself the trouble of too much verbal description, I will introduce a painter, and give him directions for the rest of the picture. Painters do not like white cottages, unless a good deal weather-stained; but, as the reader now understands that it is a winter night, his services will not be required except for the *inside* of the house.

Paint me, then, a room seventeen feet by twelve, and not more than seven and a-half feet high. This, reader, is somewhat ambitiously styled, in my family, the drawing-room; but, being contrived "a double debt to pay," it is also, and more justly, termed the library; for it happens that books are the only article of property in which I am richer than my neighbours. Of these I have about five thousand, collected gradually since my eighteenth year. Therefore, painter, put as many as you can into this room. Make it populous with books; and, furthermore, paint me a good fire; and furniture plain and modest, befitting the unpretending cottage of a scholar. And near the fire paint me a tea-table; and (as it is clear that no creature can come to see one on such a stormy night) place only two cups and saucers on the tea-tray; and, if you know how to paint such a thing, symbolically or otherwise, paint me an eternal tea-pot—eternal *à parte ante*, and *à parte post*; for I usually drink tea from eight o'clock at night to four in the morning. And, as it is very unpleasant to make tea, or to pour it out for one's-self, paint me a lovely young woman sitting at the table. Paint her arms like Aurora's, and her smiles like Hebe's; but no, dear M——! not even in jest let me insinuate that thy power to illuminate my cottage rests upon a tenure so perishable as mere personal beauty; or that the witchcraft of angelic smiles lies within the empire of any earthly pencil. Pass, then, my good painter, to something more within its power; and the next article brought forward should naturally be myself—a picture of the Opium-eater, with his "little golden receptacle of the pernicious drug" lying beside him on the table.

As to the opium, I have no objection to see a picture of *that*; you may paint it, if you choose; but I apprise you that no "little" receptacle would, even in 1816, answer *my* purpose, who was at a distance from the "stately Pantheon" and all druggists (mortal or otherwise). No: you may as well paint the real receptacle, which was not of gold, but of glass, and as much like a sublunary wine-decanter as possible. In fact, one day, by a series of happily conceived experiments, I dis-

covered that it *was* a decanter. Into this you may put a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum; that, and a book of German metaphysics placed by its side, will sufficiently attest my being in the neighbourhood; but, as to myself, there I demur. I admit that, naturally, I ought to occupy the foreground of the picture; that, being the hero of the piece, or (if you choose) the criminal at the bar, my body should be had into court. This seems reasonable; but why should I confess on this point to a painter? or why confess it at all? If the public (into whose private ear I am confidentially whispering my Confessions, and not into any painter's) should chance to have framed some agreeable picture for itself of the Opium-eater's exterior—should have ascribed to him, romantically, an elegant person or a handsome face—why should I barbarously tear from it so pleasing a delusion?—pleasing both to the public and to me. No: paint me, if at all, according to your own fancy; and, since a painter's fancy should teem with beautiful creations, I cannot fail, in that way, to be a gainer. And now, reader, we have run all through the ten categories of my condition, as it stood about 1816-17, up to the middle of which latter year I judged myself to have been a happy man; and the elements of that happiness I have endeavoured to place before you, in the above sketch of the interior of a scholar's library, in a cottage among the mountains, on a stormy winter evening, rain driving vindictively and with malice aforethought against the windows, and darkness such that you cannot see your own hand when held up against the sky.

But now farewell, a long farewell, to happiness, winter or summer! farewell to smiles and laughter! farewell to peace of mind, to tranquil dreams, and to the blessed consolations of sleep! For more than three years and a half I am summoned away from these. Here opens upon me an Iliad of woes; for I now enter upon THE PAINS OF OPIUM.

As when some great painter dips
 His pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse.
 SHELLEY'S *Revolt of Islam*.

A POTENT MEDICINE

[Characteristically enough De Quincey setting out to embark upon the pains of opium begins by a further discussion of its benefits, in particular its value as a prophylactic against consumption.]

READER, who have thus far accompanied me, I must request your attention, before we go farther, to a few explanatory notes.

I. You are already aware, I hope—else you must have a low opinion of my logic—that the opium miseries, which are now on the point of pressing forward to the front of this narrative, connect themselves with my early hardships in London (and therefore more remotely with those in Wales), by natural links of affiliation—that is, the early series of sufferings was the parent of the later. Otherwise, these Confessions would break up into two disconnected sections—first, a record of boyish calamities; secondly, a record (totally independent) of sufferings consequent upon excesses in opium. And the two sections would have no link whatever to connect them, except the slight one of having both happened to the same person. But a little attention will show the strictness of the inter-connection. The boyish sufferings, whether in Wales or London, pressing upon an organ peculiarly weak in my bodily system—viz., the stomach—caused that subsequent distress and irritability of the stomach which drove me to the use of opium as the sole remedy potent enough to control it. Here already there is exposed a sufficient *causal* connection between the two several sections of my experience. The opium would probably never have been promoted into the dignity of a daily and life-long resource, had it not proved itself to be the one sole agent equal to the task of tranquillising the miseries left behind by the youthful privations. Thus far the *nexus*, as between cause and effect, is sufficiently established between the one experience and the other—between the boyish records and the records of mature

life. There needed no other *nexus* to justify the unity of the entire Confessions. But, though not wanted, nevertheless it happens that there *is* another and a distinct link connecting the two separate records. The main phenomenon by which opium expressed itself permanently, and the sole phenomenon that was communicable, lay in the dreams (and in the peculiar dream-scenery) which followed the opium excesses. But naturally these dreams, and this dream-scenery, drew their outlines and materials—their great lights and shadows—from those profound revelations which had been ploughed so deeply into the heart, from those *encaustic* records which in the mighty furnaces of London life had been burned into the undying memory by the fierce action of misery. And thus in reality the early experiences of erring childhood not only led to the secondary experiences of opium, but also determined the particular form and pressure of the chief phenomena in these secondary experiences. Here is the briefest possible abstract of the case:—The final object of the whole record lay in the dreams. For the sake of those the entire narrative arose. But what caused the dreams? Opium used in unexampled excess. But what caused this excess in the use of opium? Simply the early sufferings; these, and these only, through the derangements which they left behind in the animal economy. On this mode of viewing the case, moving regressively from the end to the beginning, it will be seen that there is one uninterrupted bond of unity running through the entire succession of experiences—first and last: the dreams were an inheritance from the opium; the opium was an inheritance from the boyish follies.

2. You will think, perhaps, that I am too confidential and communicative of my own private history. It may be so. But my way of writing is rather to think aloud, and follow my own humours, than much to inquire who is listening to me; for, if once I stop to consider what is proper to be said, I shall soon come to doubt whether any part at all is proper. The fact is, I imagine myself writing at a distance of twenty—thirty—fifty years ahead

of this present moment, either for the satisfaction of the few who may then retain any interest in myself, or of the many (a number that is sure to be continually growing) who will take an inextinguishable interest in the mysterious powers of opium. For opium *is* mysterious; mysterious to the extent, at times, of apparent self-contradiction; and *so* mysterious, that my own long experience in its use—sometimes even in its abuse—did but mislead me into conclusions ever more and more remote from what I now suppose to be the truth. Fifty-and-two years' experience of opium, as a magical resource under *all* modes of bodily suffering, I may now claim to have had, allowing only for some periods of four or six months during which, by unexampled efforts of self-conquest, I had accomplished a determined abstinence from opium. These parentheses being subtracted, as also, and secondly, some off-and-on fits of tentative and intermitting dalliance with opium in the opening of my career—these deductions allowed for, I may describe myself as experimentally acquainted with opium for something more than half-a-century. What, then, is my final report upon its good and evil results? In particular, upon these two capital tendencies of habitual opium-eating under the popular misconceptions—viz., its supposed necessity of continually clamouring for increasing quantities; secondly, its supposed corresponding declension in power and efficacy.

Upon these ugly scandals, what is my most deliberate award? At the age of forty, the reader is aware that, under our ancestral proverb, every man is a fool or a physician. It is my duty, it seems, thus far to be a physician—to guarantee, so far as human foresight *can* guarantee, my own corporeal sanity. And this, trying the case by ordinary practical tests, I have accomplished. And I add solemnly, that without opium, most certainly I could not have accomplished such a result. Thirty-five years ago, beyond all doubt, I should have been in my grave. And as to the two popular dilemmas—that either you must renounce opium or else indefinitely augment the daily ration; and,

secondly, that, even submitting to such a postulate, you must content yourself, under any scale of doses, with an effect continually decaying, in fact, that you must ultimately descend into the despairing condition of the martyr to dram-drinking—at this point I make a resolute stand, in blank denial of the whole doctrine. Originally, when first entering upon my opium career, I did so with great anxiety: and before my eyes floated for ever the analogies—dim or *not* dim, according to my spirits at the moment—of the poor, perishing brandy-drinker, often on the brink of *delirium tremens!* Opium I pursued under a harsh necessity, as an unknown, shadowy power, leading I knew not whither, and a power that might suddenly change countenance upon this unknown road. Habitually I lived under such an impression of awe as we have all felt from stories of fawns, or seeming fawns, that have run before some mounted hunter for many a league, until they have tempted him far into the mazes of a boundless forest, and at that point, where all regress had become lost and impossible, either suddenly vanished, leaving the man utterly bewildered, or assumed some more fearful shape. A part of the evil which I feared actually unfolded itself; but all was due to my own ignorance, to neglect of cautionary measures, or to gross mismanagement of my health in points where I well knew the risks but grievously underrated their urgency and pressure. I was temperate: that solitary advantage I had; but I sank under the lulling seductions of opium into total sedentariness, and *that* whilst holding firmly the belief, that powerful exercise was omnipotent against all modes of debility or obscure nervous irritations. The account of my depression, and almost of my helplessness, in the next memorandum (No. 3), is faithful as a description to the real case. But, in ascribing that case to opium, as any transcendent and overmastering agency, I was thoroughly wrong. Twenty days of exercise, twenty times twenty miles of walking, at the ordinary pace of three and a half miles an hour, or perhaps half that amount, would have sent me up as buoyantly as a balloon into regions of natural

and healthy excitement, where dejection is an impossible phenomenon. O heavens! how man abuses or neglects his natural resources! Yes, the thoughtful reader is disposed to say; but very possibly distinguishing between such *natural* resources and opium as a resource that is *not* natural, but highly artificial, or even absolutely unnatural. I think otherwise: upon the basis of my really vast, perhaps unequalled, experience (let me add of my *tentative* experience, varying its trials in every conceivable mode so as to meet the question at issue under every angle), I advance these three following propositions, all of them unsuspected by the popular mind, and the last of them (as cannot much longer fail to be discovered) bearing a national value—I mean, as meeting our English hereditary complaint:—

I. With respect to the morbid growth upon the opium-eater of his peculiar habit, when once rooted in the system, and throwing out *tentacula* like a cancer, it is out of my power to deliver any such oracular judgment upon the case—*i.e.*, upon the apparent danger of such a course, and by what stages it might be expected to travel towards its final consummation—as naturally I should wish to do. Being an oracle, it is my wish to behave myself like an oracle, and not to evade any decent man's questions in the way that Apollo too often did at Delphi. But, in this particular instance before me, the accident of my own individual seamanship in presence of this storm interfered with the natural evolution of the problem in its extreme form of danger. I had become too uneasy under the consciousness of that intensely artificial condition into which I had imperceptibly lapsed through unprecedented quantities of opium; the shadows of eclipse were too dark and lurid not to rouse and alarm me into a spasmodic effort for reconquering the ground which I had lost. Such an effort I made: every step by which I had gone astray did I patiently unthread. And thus I fought off the natural and spontaneous catastrophe, whatever *that* might be, which mighty Nature would else have let loose for redressing the wrongs offered to herself. But what followed? In six or eight months

more, upon fresh movements arising of insupportable nervous irritation, I fled back into the same opium lull. To and fro, up and down, did I tilt upon those mountainous seas for year after year. "See-saw,"¹ like Margery Daw, that sold her bed and lay on straw."

Even so did I, led astray, perhaps, by the classical example of Miss Daw, see-saw for year after year, out and in, of manœuvres the most intricate, dances the most elaborate, receding or approaching, round my great central sun of opium; Sometimes I ran perilously close into my perihelion; sometimes I became frightened, and wheeled off into a vast cometary aphelion, where for six months "opium" was a word unknown. How nature stood all these see-sawings is quite a mystery to me: I must have led her a sad life in those days. Nervous irritation forced me, at times, upon frightful excesses; but terror from anomalous symptoms sooner or later forced me back. This terror was strengthened by the vague hypotheses current at that period about spontaneous combustion. Might I not myself take leave of the literary world in that fashion? According to the popular fancy there were two modes of this spontaneity; and really very little to choose between them. Upon one variety of this explosion a man blew up in the dark, without match or candle near him, leaving nothing behind him but some bones, of no use to anybody, and which were supposed to be *his* only because nobody else ever applied for them. It was fancied that some volcanic agency—an unknown deposition—accumulated from some vast redundancy of brandy, furnished the self-exploding principle. But this startled the faith of most people; and a more plausible scheme suggested itself which depended upon the concurrence of a lucifer-match. Without an incendiary, a man could not take fire. We sometimes see

¹ "See-saw," etc.:—O dear reader, surely you don't want an oracle to tell you that this is a good old nursery lyric, which through four centuries has stood the criticism—stood the anger against Daw's enemies—stood the pity for Daw herself, so infamously reduced to straw—of children through eighty generations, reckoning five years to each nursery succession.

the hands of inveterate dram-drinkers throw off an atmosphere of intoxicating vapours, strong enough to lay flies into a state of sleep or *coma*; and on the same principle it was supposed that the breath might be so loaded with spirituous particles, as to catch fire from a match applied to a pipe when held between the lips. If so, then what should hinder the "devouring element" (as newspapers call fire) from spreading through the throat to the cavity of the chest: in which case, not being insured, the man would naturally become a total loss. Opium, however, it will occur to the reader, is not alcohol. That is true. But it might, for anything that was known experimentally, be ultimately worse. Coleridge, the only person known to the public as having dallied systematically and for many years with opium, could not be looked to for any candid report of its history and progress; besides that, Coleridge was under a permanent craze of having nearly accomplished his own liberation from opium, and thus he had come to have an *extra* reason for self-delusion. Finding myself, therefore, walking on a solitary path of bad repute, leading *whither* no man's experience could tell me, I became proportionably cautious; and, if nature had any plot for making an example of me, I was resolved to baulk her.

Thus it was that I never followed out the seductions of opium to their final extremity. But, nevertheless, in evading that extremity, I stumbled upon as great a discovery as if I had *not* evaded it. After the first or second self-conquest in this conflict—although finding it impossible to persist through more than a few months in the abstinence from opium—I remarked, however, that the domineering tyranny of its exactions was at length steadily declining. Quantities noticeably less had now become sufficient: and, after the fourth of these victories, won with continually decreasing efforts, I found that not only had the daily dose (upon relapsing) suffered a self-limitation to an enormous extent, but also that, upon any attempt obstinately to renew the old doses, there arose a new symptom—viz., an irritation on the surface of the skin—which soon became insupportable, and tended

to distraction. In about four years, without any further efforts, my daily ration had fallen *spontaneously* from a varying quantity of eight, ten, or twelve thousand drops of laudanum to about three hundred. I describe the drug as *laudanum*, because another change ran along collaterally with this supreme change—viz., that the solid opium began to require a length of time, continually increasing, to expand its effects sensibly, oftentimes not less than four hours; whereas the tincture manifested its presence instantaneously.

Thus, then, I had reached a position from which authoritatively it might be pronounced, as a result of long, anxious, and vigilant experience, that, on the assumption of earnest (even though intermitting) efforts towards recurrent abstinences on the part of the opium-eater, the practice of indulging to the very greatest excess in this narcotic tends to a natural (almost an inevitable) euthanasia. Many years ago, when briefly touching on this subject, I announced (as a fact even *then* made known to me) that no instance of abstinence, though it were but of three days' continuance, ever perishes. Ten grains, deducted from a daily ration of five hundred, will tell through a series of many weeks, and will be found again modifying the final result, even at the close of the year's reckoning. At this day, after a half-century of oscillating experience, and after no efforts or trying acts of self-denial beyond those severe ones attached to the several processes (five or six in all) of re-conquering my freedom from the yoke of opium, I find myself pretty nearly at the same station which I occupied at that vast distance of time. It is recorded of Lord Nelson that, even after the Nile and Copenhagen, he still paid the penalty, on the first days of resuming his naval life, which is generally exacted by nature from the youngest little midddy or the rawest griffin—viz., sea-sickness. And this happens to a considerable proportion of sailors: they do not recover their sea-legs till some days after getting afloat. The very same thing happens to veteran opium-eaters, when first, after long intermissions, resuming too abruptly their ancient familiarities with opium. It is a fact,

which I mention as indicating the enormous revolutions passed through, that, within these five years, I have turned pale, and felt warnings, pointing towards such an uneasiness, after taking not more than twenty grains of opium. At present, and for some years, I have been habitually content with five or six grains daily, instead of 320 to 400 grains. Let me wind up this retrospect with saying, that the powers of opium, as an anodyne, but still more as a tranquilliser of nervous and anomalous sensations, have not in the smallest degree decayed; and that, if it has casually unveiled its early power of exacting slight penalties from any trivial inattention to accurate proportions, it has more than commensurately renewed its ancient privilege of lulling irritation and of supporting preternatural calls for exertion.

My first proposition, therefore, amounts to this—that the process of weaning one's-self from the deep bondage of opium, by many people viewed with despairing eyes, is not only a possible achievement, and one which grows easier in every stage of its progress, but is favoured and promoted by nature in secret ways that could not, without some experience, have been suspected. This, however, is but a sorry commendation of any resource making great pretensions, that, by a process confessedly trying to human firmness, it can ultimately be thrown aside. Certainly little would be gained by the negative service of cancelling a drawback upon an agency whatever, until it were shown that this drawback has availed to disturb and neutralise great positive blessings lying within the gift of that agency. What are the advantages connected with opium that can merit any such name as blessings?

II. Briefly let me say, in the *second* proposition, that, if the reader had, in any South American forest, seen growing rankly some great febrifuge (such as the Jesuits' bark), he would probably have noticed it with slight regard. To understand its value, he must first have suffered from intermittent fever. Bark might strike him as an unnatural stimulant; but, when he came to see that

tertian or quartan fever was also an unnatural pressure upon human energies, he would begin to guess that two counter unnaturals may terminate in one most natural and salubrious result. Nervous irritation is the secret desolator of human life; and for this there is probably no adequate controlling power but that of opium, taken daily, under steady regulation.

III. But even more momentous is the burden of my *third* proposition. Are you aware, reader, what it is that constitutes the scourge (physically speaking) of Great Britain and Ireland? All readers, who direct any part of their attention to medical subjects must know that it is pulmonary consumption. If you walk through a forest at certain seasons, you will see what is called a *blaze* of white paint upon a certain *élite* of the trees marked out by the forester as ripe for the axe. Such a blaze, if the shadowy world could reveal its futurities, would be seen everywhere distributing its secret badges of cognisance amongst our youthful men and women. Of those that, in the expression of Pericles, constitute the vernal section of our population, what a multitudinous crowd would be seen to wear upon their foreheads the same sad ghastly blaze, or some equivalent symbol of dedication to an early grave. How appalling in its amount is this annual slaughter amongst those that should by birthright be specially the children of hope, and levied impartially from *every* rank of society! Is the income-tax or the poor-rate, faithful as each is to its regulating tide-tables, paid by *any* class with as much punctuality as this premature *florilegium*, this gathering and rendering up of blighted blossoms, by *all* classes? Then comes the startling question—that pierces the breaking hearts of so many thousand afflicted relatives—Is there no remedy? Is there no palliation of the evil? Waste not a thought upon the idle question, whether he that speaks is armed with this form or that form of authorisation and sanction! Think within yourself how infinite would be the scorn of any poor sorrow-stricken mother, if she—standing over the coffin of her daughter—could believe or could imagine that any vestige of ceremonial

scruples, or of fool-born superstitions, or the terror of a word, or old traditional prejudice, had been allowed to neutralise one chance in a thousand for her daughter—had by possibility (but, as I could tell her, had sometimes to a certainty) stepped between patients and deliverance from the grave, sure and perfect! “What matter,” she would cry out, indignantly, “who it is that says the thing, so long as the thing itself is true?”

It is the potent and faithful *word* that is wanted, in perfect slight of the organ through which it is uttered. Let me premise this notorious fact, that all consumption, though latent in the constitution, and indicated often to the eye in bodily conformation, does not therefore manifest itself as a disease, until some form of “cold” or bronchitis, some familiar affection of the chest or of the lungs, arises to furnish a starting-point for the morbid development.¹ Now the one fatal blunder lies in suffering that development to occur; and the one counterworking secret for pre-arrestment of this evil lies in steadily, by whatever means, keeping up and promoting the insensible perspiration. In that one simple art of controlling a constant function of the animal economy, lies a magician’s talisman for defeating the forces leagued against the great organs of respiration. Pulmonary affections, if not *previously* suffered to develop themselves cannot live under the hourly counterworking of this magical force. Consequently, the one question in arrear is, what potent drug

¹ Here is a parallel case, equally fatal where it occurs, but happily moving within a far narrower circle. About fifty years ago, Sir Everard Home, a surgeon of the highest class, mentioned as a dreadful caution, that, within his own experience, many an indolent tumour in the face, not unfrequently the most trifling pimple, which for thirty or more years had caused no uneasiness whatever, suddenly might chance to receive the slightest possible wound from a razor in the act of shaving. What followed? Once disturbed, the trivial excrescence became an open cancer. Is the parallel catastrophe in the pulmonary system, when pushed forward into development, at all less likely to hide its importance from un-instructed eyes? Yet, on the other hand, it is a thousand times more likely to happen.

is that which possesses this power, a power like that of "Amram's son," for evoking salubrious streams, welling forth benignly from systems else parched and arid as rocks in the wilderness? There is none that I know of answering the need but opium. The powers of that great agent I first learned dimly to guess at from a remark made to me by a lady in London; then, and for some time previously, she had been hospitably entertaining Coleridge, whom, indeed, she tended with the anxiety of a daughter. Consequently, she was familiarly acquainted with his opium habits; and, on my asking, in reply to some remark of hers, how she could be so sure as her words implied that Coleridge was just then likely to be incapacitated for writing (or, indeed, for any literary exertion), she said, "Oh, I know it well by the glistening of his cheeks." Coleridge's face, as is well known to his acquaintances, exposed a large surface of cheek; too large for the intellectual expression of his features generally, had not the final effect been redeemed by what Wordsworth styled his "godlike forehead." The result was that no possible face so broadly betrayed and published any effects whatever, especially these lustrous effects from excesses in opium. For some years I failed to consider reflectively, or else, reflecting, I failed to decipher, this resplendent acreage of cheek. But at last, either *proprio Marte*, or prompted by some medical hint, I came to understand that the glistening face, glorious from afar like the old Pagan face of the demigod Æsculapius, simply reported the gathering accumulations of insensible perspiration.

In the very hour, a memorable hour, of making that discovery, I made another. My own history, medically speaking, involved a mystery. At the commencement of my opium career, I had myself been pronounced repeatedly a martyr elect to pulmonary consumption. And although, in the common decencies of humanity, this opinion upon my prospects had always been accompanied with some formal words of encouragement—as, for instance, that constitutions, after all, varied by endless differences; that nobody could fix

limits to the powers of medicine, or, in default of medicine, to the healing resources of nature herself; yet, without something like a miracle in my favour, I was instructed to regard myself as a condemned subject. That was the upshot of these agreeable communications; alarming enough; and they were rendered more so by these three facts:—first, the opinions were pronounced by the highest authorities in Christendom—viz., the physicians at Clifton and the Bristol Hotwells, who saw more of pulmonary disorders in one twelvemonth than the rest of the profession through all Europe in a century; for the disease, it must be remembered, was almost peculiar as a national scourge to Britain, interlinked with the local accidents of the climate and its restless changes; so that only in England could it be studied, and even there only in perfection at these Bristolian adjacencies—the reason being this, all opulent patients resorted to the Devonshire watering-places, where the balmy temperature of the air and prevailing winds allowed the myrtle and other greenhouse shrubs to stand out of doors all winter through; and naturally on the road to Devonshire all patients alike touched at Clifton. There I was myself continually resident. Many, therefore, and of supreme authority, were the prophets of evil that announced to me my doom. Secondly, they were countenanced by the ugly fact that I out of eight children was the one who most closely inherited the bodily conformation of a father who had died of consumption at the early age of thirty-nine. Thirdly, I offered at the first glance, to a medical eye, every symptom of *phthisis* broadly and conspicuously developed. The hectic colours on the face, the nocturnal perspirations, the growing embarrassment of the respiration, and other expressions of gathering feebleness under any attempts at taking exercise—all these symptoms were steadily accumulating between the age of twenty-two and twenty-four. What was it that first arrested them? Simply the use, continually becoming more regular, of opium. Nobody recommended this drug to me; on the contrary, under that ignorant horror which everywhere invested opium, I saw too clearly that any avowed

use of it would expose me to a rabid persecution.¹ Under the sincere and unaffected hope of saving me from destruction, I should have been hunted into the grave within six months. I kept my own counsel; said nothing; awakened no suspicions; persevered more and more determinately in the use of opium; and finally effected so absolute a conquest over all pulmonary symptoms, as could not have failed to fix upon me the astonishment of Clifton, had not the sense of wonder been broken by the lingering time consumed in the several stages of the malady, and still more effectually by my own personal withdrawal from Clifton and its neighbourhoods.

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The reader will infer, from what I have now said, that all passages, written at an earlier period under cloudy and uncorrected views of the evil agencies presumable in opium, stand retracted; although, shrinking from the labour of altering an error diffused so widely under my own early misconceptions of the truth, I have suffered them to remain as they were. My general views upon the powers and natural tendencies of opium were all supported and strengthened by this fortunate advantage of a professional correspondence. My special doctrine I now repeat at this point of valediction, and in a rememberable form. Lord Bacon said once, too boldly and hazardously, that he who discovers the secret of making myrrh soluble by human blood has discovered the secret of immortal life. I propose a more modest

¹ "*Rabid persecution*:"—I do not mean that, in the circumstances of my individual position, any opening could have arisen to an opposition more than verbal; since it would have been easy for me at all times to withdraw myself by hundreds of leagues from controversies upon the case. But the reasons for concealment were not the less urgent. For it would have been painful to find myself reduced to the dilemma of either practising habitual and complex dissimulation, or, on the other hand, of throwing myself headlong into that fiery vortex of hot-headed ignorance upon the very name of opium, which to this hour (though with less of rancorous bigotry) makes it hazardous to avow any daily use of so potent a drug.

form of magic—that he who discovers the secret of stimulating and keeping up unintermittingly the insensible perspiration, has discovered the secret of intercepting pulmonary consumption. In my medical character, I here take leave of the reader, and fall back into the current of my regular narrative.

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NEMESIS

[After the first period of pleasurable indulgence at Grasmere, opium, taken in increasing doses, exacted its penalties. De Quincey passed some three years in gloom and torpor. No doubt, with his keen eye for literary effect, he exaggerated his own misery; but his account of his sufferings is a valuable psychological document. No writer has ever described with more accuracy of perception that paralysis of the will and stagnation of the intellect which the habitual and excessive use of narcotics and stimulants may produce. De Quincey believed that his sanity, if not his life, was endangered, until the pressure of financial embarrassment roused him to exertion in 1819, and compelled him to emancipate himself in some degree from his thralldom.]

My studies have now been long interrupted. I cannot read to myself with any pleasure, hardly with a moment's endurance. Yet I sometimes read aloud for the pleasure of others; because reading is an accomplishment of mine, and, in the slang use of the word *accomplishment* as a superficial and ornamental attainment, almost the only one I possess; and formerly, if I had any vanity at all connected with any endowment or attainment of mine, it was with this; for I had observed that no accomplishment is more rare. Actors are the worst readers of all. John Kemble is not effective as a reader, though he has the great advantage of mature scholarship; and his sister, the immortal Siddons, with all her superiority to him in voice, reads even less effectively. She reads nothing well but dramatic works. In the *Paradise Lost*, which I heard her attempt at Barley Wood, her failure was distressing; almost as

distressing as the sycophantic applause of the surrounding company—all lost, of course, in nearly speechless admiration. Neither Coleridge nor Southey is a good reader of verse. Southey is admirable almost in all things, but not in this. Both he and Coleridge read as if crying, or at least wailing lugubriously. People in general either read poetry without any passion at all, or else overstep the modesty of nature. Of late, if I have felt moved by anything in books, it has been by the grand lamentations of *Samson Agonistes*, or the great harmonies of the Satanic speeches in *Paradise Regained*, when read aloud by myself. We are far from towns; but a young lady sometimes comes and drinks tea with us; at her request and M——'s, I now and then read Wordsworth's Poems to them. (Wordsworth, by the bye, is the only poet I ever met who could read his own verses; often, indeed, he reads admirably.)

For nearly two years I believe that I read nothing and studied nothing. Analytic studies are continuous studies, and not to be pursued by fits and starts or fragmentary efforts. All these were become unsupportable to me; I shrank from them with a sense of powerless and infantile feebleness that gave me an anguish the greater from remembering the time when I grappled with them to my own hourly delight; and for this further reason, because I had devoted the labour of my whole life, had dedicated my intellect, blossoms and fruits, to the slow and elaborate toil of constructing one single work, to which I had presumed to give the title of an unfinished work of Spinoza's—viz., *De Emendatione Humani Intellectus*. This was now lying locked up as by frost, like any Spanish bridge or aqueduct begun upon too great a scale for the resources of the architect; and, instead of surviving me, as a monument of wishes at least, and aspirations, and long labours, dedicated to the exaltation of human nature in that way in which God had best fitted me to promote so great an object, it was likely to stand a memorial to my children of hopes defeated, of baffled efforts, of materials uselessly accumulated, of foundations laid that were never to support a superstructure,

of the grief and the ruin of the architect. In this state of imbecility I had, for amusement, turned my attention to political economy. My understanding, which formerly had been as active and restless as a panther, could not, I suppose (so long as I lived at all), sink into utter lethargy; and political economy offers this advantage to a person in my state, that, though it is eminently an organic science (no part, that is to say, but what acts on the whole, as the whole again reacts on and through each part), yet still the several parts may be detached and contemplated singly. Great as was the prostration of my powers at this time, yet I could not forget my knowledge; and my understanding had been for too many years intimate with severe thinkers, with logic, and the great masters of knowledge, not to be aware of a great call made by political economy at this crisis for a new law and a transcendent legislator. Suddenly, in 1818, a friend in Edinburgh sent me down Mr. Ricardo's book; and, recurring to my own prophetic anticipation of some coming legislator for the science, I said, before I had finished the first chapter, "Thou art the man!" Wonder and curiosity were emotions that had long been dead in me. Yet I wondered once more—wondered at myself that could once again be stimulated to the effort of reading; and much more I wondered at the book. Had this profound work been really written during the tumultuous hurry of the nineteenth century? Could it be that an Englishman, and he not in academic bowers, but oppressed by mercantile and senatorial cares, had accomplished what all the universities of Europe, and a century of thought, had failed even to advance by one hair's breadth? Previous writers had been crushed and overlaid by the enormous weights of facts, details, and exceptions; Mr. Ricardo had deduced, *à priori*, from the understanding itself, laws which first shot arrowy light into the dark chaos of materials, and had thus constructed what hitherto was but a collection of tentative discussions into a science of regular proportions, now first standing upon an eternal basis.

Thus did one simple work of a profound understand-

ing avail to give me a pleasure and an activity which I had not known for years; it roused me even to write, or, at least, to dictate what M—— wrote for me. It seemed to me that some important truths had escaped even “the inevitable eye” of Mr. Ricardo; and, as these were, for the most part, of such a nature that I could express or illustrate them briefly and elegantly by algebraic symbols, the whole would hardly have reached the bulk of a pamphlet. With M—— for my amanuensis, even at this time, incapable as I was of all general exertion, I drew up, therefore, my *Prolegomena to all Future Systems of Political Economy*.

This exertion, however, was but a momentary flash, as the sequel showed. Arrangements were made at a provincial press, about eighteen miles distant, for printing it. An additional compositor was retained for some days, on this account. The work was even twice advertised; and I was, in a manner, pledged to the fulfilment of my intention. But I had a preface to write, and a dedication, which I wished to make impressive, to Mr. Ricardo. I found myself quite unable to accomplish all this. The arrangements were countermanded, the compositor dismissed, and my *Prolegomena* rested peacefully by the side of its elder and more dignified brother.

In thus describing and illustrating my intellectual torpor, I use terms that apply, more or less, to every part of the years during which I was under the Circean spells of opium. But for misery and suffering I might, indeed, be said to have existed in a dormant state. I seldom could prevail on myself to write a letter; an answer of a few words, to any that I received, was the utmost that I could accomplish; and often *that* not until the letter had lain for weeks, or even months, on my writing-table. Without the aid of M——, my whole domestic economy, whatever became of political economy, must have gone into irretrievable confusion. I shall not afterwards allude to this part of the case; it is one, however, which the opium-eater will find, in the end, most oppressive and tormenting, from the sense of in-

capacity and feebleness, from the direct embarrassments incident to the neglect or procrastination of each day's appropriate labours, and from the remorse which must often exasperate the stings of these evils to a conscientious mind. The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities or aspirations; he wishes and longs as earnestly as ever to realise what he believes possible, and feels to be exacted by duty; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of proposing or willing. He lies under a world's weight of incubus and nightmare; he lies in sight of all that he would fain perform; just as a man forcibly confined to his bed by the mortal languor of paralysis, who is compelled to witness injury or outrage offered to some object of his tenderest love:—he would lay down his life if he might but rise and walk; but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot so much as make an effort to move.

THE DREAMS OF OPIUM

[De Quincey winds up his narrative with an impassioned and vividly imaginative account of his nightly dreams when the opium-cloud lay heaviest upon him, before he was able by desperate and sustained efforts to reduce his drug-taking to manageable limits. One may regret that he did not carry out his intention of adding some further visions to this magnificent dream-series. What we have is a mere fragment, but a fragment which has enriched English literature with some imperishable pages.]

BUT from this I now pass to what is the main subject of these latter Confessions—to the history and journal of what took place in my dreams; for these were the immediate and proximate cause of shadowy terrors that settled and brooded over my whole waking life.

The first notice I had of any important change going on in this part of my physical economy, was from the reawaking of a state of eye oftentimes incident to childhood. I know not whether my reader is aware that

many children have a power of painting, as it were, upon the darkness all sorts of phantoms; in some that power is simply a mechanic affection of the eye; others have a voluntary or semi-voluntary power to dismiss or summon such phantoms; or, as a child once said to me when I questioned him on this matter, "I can tell them to go, and they go; but sometimes they come when I don't tell them to come." He had by one-half as unlimited a command over apparitions as a Roman centurion over his soldiers. In the middle of 1817 this faculty became increasingly distressing to me: at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions moved along continually in mournful pomp; friezes of never-ending stories, that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as stories drawn from times before *Œdipus* or *Priam*, before *Tyre*, before *Memphis*. And, concurrently with this, a corresponding change took place in my dreams; a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour. And the four following facts may be mentioned as noticeable at this time:—

1. That, as the creative state of the eye increased, a sympathy seemed to arise between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain in one point—that whatsoever I happened to call up and to trace by a voluntary act upon the darkness was very apt to transfer itself to my dreams; and at length I feared to exercise this faculty; for, as *Midas* turned all things to gold that yet baffled his hopes and defrauded his human desires, so whatsoever things capable of being visually represented I did but think of in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms for the eye; and, by a process apparently no less inevitable, when thus once traced in faint and visionary colours, like writings in sympathetic ink, they were drawn out by the fierce chemistry of my dreams, into insufferable splendour that fretted my heart.

2. This and all other changes in my dreams were accompanied by deep-seated anxiety and funereal melancholy, such as are wholly incommunicable by words. I

seemed every night to descend—not metaphorically, but literally to descend—into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever reascend. Nor did I, by waking, feel that I *had* reascended. Why should I dwell upon this? For indeed the state of gloom which attended these gorgeous spectacles, amounting at last to utter darkness, as of some suicidal despondency, cannot be approached by words.

3. The sense of space, and in the end the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, etc., were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable and self-repeating infinity. This disturbed me very much less than the vast expansion of time. Sometimes I seemed to have lived for seventy or a hundred years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience.

4. The minutest incidents of childhood, or forgotten scenes of later years, were often revived. I could not be said to recollect them; for, if I had been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as parts of my past experience. But placed as they were before me, in dreams like intuitions, and clothed in all their evanescent circumstances and accompanying feelings, I *recognised* them instantaneously. I was once told by a near relative of mine, that, having in her childhood fallen into a river, and being on the very verge of death but for the assistance which reached her at the last critical moment, she saw in a moment her whole life, clothed in its forgotten incidents, arrayed before her as in a mirror, not successively, but simultaneously; and she had a faculty developed as suddenly for comprehending the whole and every part.¹ This, from

¹ The heroine of this remarkable case was a girl about nine years old; and there can be little doubt that she looked down as far within the *crater* of death—that awful volcano—as any human being ever *can* have done that has lived to draw back and to report her experience. Not less than ninety years did she survive

some opium experiences, I can believe; I have, indeed, seen the same thing twice asserted in modern books, and accompanied by a remark which probably is true—viz., that the dread book of account which the Scriptures

this memorable escape; and I may describe her as in all respects a woman of remarkable and interesting qualities. She enjoyed throughout her long life, as the reader will readily infer, serene and cloudless health; had a masculine understanding; revered truth not less than did the evangelists; and led a life of saintly devotion, such as might have glorified "*Hilarion or Paul.*" (The words in italic are Ariosto's.) I mention these traits as characterising her in a memorable extent, that the reader may not suppose himself relying upon a dealer in exaggerations, upon a credulous enthusiast, or upon a careless wielder of language. Forty-five years had intervened between the first time and the last time of her telling me this anecdote, and not one iota had shifted its ground amongst the incidents, nor had any of the most trivial of the circumstantiations suffered change. The scene of the accident was the least of valleys, what the Greeks of old would have called an *ἀγρος*, and we English should properly call a dell. Human tenant it had none; even at noonday it was a solitude; and would oftentimes have been a silent solitude but for the brawling of a brook—not broad, but occasionally deep—which ran along the base of the little hills. Into this brook, probably into one of its dangerous pools, the child fell: and, according to the ordinary chances, she could have had but a slender prospect indeed of any deliverance; for, although a dwelling-house was close by, it was shut out from view by the undulations of the ground. How long the child lay in the water, was probably never inquired earnestly until the answer had become irrecoverable: for a servant, to whose care the child was then confided, had a natural interest in suppressing the whole case. From the child's own account, it should seem that *asphyxia* must have announced its commencement. A process of struggle and deadly suffocation was passed through half consciously. This process terminated by a sudden blow apparently *on* or *in* the brain, after which there was no pain or conflict; but in an instant succeeded a dazzling rush of light; immediately after which came the solemn apocalypse of the entire past life. Meantime, the child's disappearance in the water had happily been witnessed by a farmer who rented some fields in this little solitude, and by a rare accident was riding through them at the moment. Not being very well mounted, he was retarded by the hedges and other fences in making his way down to the water; some time was thus lost; but once at the spot, he leaped in, booted and spurred, and succeeded in delivering one that must have been as nearly counted amongst the populations of the grave as perhaps the laws of the shadowy world can suffer to return!

speaking of it, in fact, the mind itself of each individual. Of this, at least, I feel assured, that there is no such thing as ultimate *forgetting*; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind. Accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil. But alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever; just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, whereas, in fact, we all know that it is the light which is drawn over them as a veil; and that they are waiting to be revealed, whenever the obscuring daylight itself shall have withdrawn.

Having noted these four facts as memorably distinguishing my dreams from those of health, I shall now cite a few illustrative cases; and shall then cite such others as I remember, in any order that may give them most effect as pictures to the reader.

I had been in youth, and ever since, for occasional amusement, a great reader of Livy, whom I confess that I prefer, both for style and matter, to any other of the Roman historians; and I had often felt as solemn and appalling sounds, emphatically representative of Roman majesty, the two words so often occurring in Livy, *Consul Romanus*; especially when the consul is introduced in his military character. I mean to say that the words, king, sultan, regent, etc., or any other titles of those who embody in their own persons the collective majesty of a great people, had less power over my reverential feelings. I had also, though no great reader of history, made myself critically familiar with one period of English history—viz., the period of the Parliamentary War—having been attracted by the moral grandeur of some who figured in that day, and by the interesting memoirs which survive those unquiet times. Both these parts of my lighter reading, having furnished me often with matter of reflection, now furnished me with matter for my dreams. Often I used to see, after painting upon the blank darkness a sort of rehearsal whilst waking, a crowd of ladies, and perhaps a festival and dances. And

I heard it said, or I said to myself, "These are English ladies from the unhappy times of Charles I. These are the wives and daughters of those who met in peace, and sat at the same tables, and were allied by marriage or by blood; and yet, after a certain day in August, 1642, never smiled upon each other again, nor met but in the field of battle; and at Marston Moor, at Newbury, or at Naseby, cut asunder all ties of love by the cruel sabre, and washed away in blood the memory of ancient friendship." The ladies danced, and looked as lovely as at the court of George IV. Yet even in my dream I knew that they had been in the grave for nearly two centuries. This pageant would suddenly dissolve; and, at a clapping of hands, would be heard the heart-shaking sound of *Consul Romanus*, and immediately came "sweeping by," in gorgeous paludaments, Paullus or Marius, girt around by a company of centurions, with the crimson tunic¹ hoisted on a spear, and followed by the *alalagmos*² of the Roman legions.

Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Coleridge, then standing by, described to me a set of plates from that artist, called his "Dreams," and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever. Some of these (I describe only from memory of Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls; on the floor of which stood mighty engines and machinery, wheels, cables, catapults, etc., expressive of enormous power put forth or resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls you perceived a staircase; and upon this, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself. Follow the stairs a little farther, and you perceive them reaching an abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who should reach the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, at least you suppose that his labours must

¹ "The crimson tunic:"—The signal which announced a day of battle.

² "Alalagmos:"—A word expressing collectively the gathering of the Roman war-cries—*Aldla, Aldla!*

now in some way terminate. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher, on which again Piranesi is perceived, by this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Once again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is descried; and there, again, is the delirious Piranesi, busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and the hopeless Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall. With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams. In the early stage of the malady, the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural; and I beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as never yet was beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds. From a great modern poet I cite the part of a passage which describes, as an appearance actually beheld in the clouds, what in many of the circumstances I saw frequently in sleep:—

The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
 Was of a mighty city—boldly say
 A wilderness of building, sinking far
 And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth,
 Far sinking into splendour without end!
 Fabric it seem'd of diamond and of gold,
 With alabaster domes and silver spires,
 And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
 Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright,
 In avenues disposed; there, towers begirt
 With battlements that on their restless fronts
 Bore stars—illumination of all gems!
 By earthly nature had the effect been wrought
 Upon the dark materials of the storm
 Now pacified; on them, and on the coves,
 And mountain steeps and summits, whereunto
 The vapours had receded—taking there
 Their station under a cerulean sky.

The sublime circumstance—“that on their *restless* fronts bore stars”—might have been copied from my own architectural dreams, so often did it occur. We hear it reported of Dryden, and in later times of Fuseli, that they ate raw meat for the sake of obtaining splendid dreams: how much better, for such a purpose, to have eaten opium, which yet I do not remember that any poet

is recorded to have done, except the dramatist Shadwell; and in ancient days Homer is, I think, rightly reputed to have known the virtues of opium as a φάρμακον νηπενθέε*s*—i.e., as an anodyne.

To my architecture succeeded dreams of lakes and silvery expanses of water: these haunted me so much that I feared lest some dropsical state or tendency of the brain might thus be making itself (to use a metaphysical word) *objective*; and that the sentient organ might be projecting itself as its own object. For two months I suffered greatly in my head—a part of my bodily structure which had hitherto been so clear from all touch or taint of weakness (physically, I mean), that I used to say of it, as the last Lord Orford said of his stomach, that it seemed likely to survive the rest of my person. Till now, I had never felt a headache even, or any the slightest pain, except rheumatic pains caused by my own folly.

The waters gradually changed their character—from translucent lakes, shining like mirrors, they became seas and oceans. And now came a tremendous change, which, unfolding itself slowly like a scroll, through many months, promised an abiding torment; and, in fact, it never left me, though recurring more or less intermittingly. Hitherto the human face had often mixed in my dreams, but not despotically, nor with any special power of tormenting. But now that affection, which I have called the tyranny of the human face, began to unfold itself. Perhaps some part of my London life (the searching for Ann amongst fluctuating crowds) might be answerable for this. Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations: infinite was my agitation; my mind tossed, as it seemed, upon the billowy ocean, and weltered upon the weltering waves.

May, 1818.—The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. Every night, through his means, I have been transported into Asiatic scenery. I know not whether

others share in my feelings on this point; but I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, if on no other ground, it would have a dim, reverential feeling connected with it. But there are other reasons. No man can pretend that the wild, barbarous, and capricious superstitions of Africa, or of savage tribes elsewhere, affect him in the way that he is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Hindostan. The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, above all, of their mythologies, etc., is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual. A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed. Even Englishmen, though not bred in any knowledge of such institutions, cannot but shudder at the mystic sublimity of *castes* that have flowed apart, and refused to mix, through such immemorial tracts of time; nor can any man fail to be awed by the sanctity of the Ganges, or by the very name of the Euphrates. It contributes much to these feelings, that South-eastern Asia is, and has been for thousands of years, the part of the earth most swarming with human life, the great *officina gentium*. Man is a weed in those regions. The vast empires, also, into which the enormous population of Asia has always been cast, give a further sublimity to the feelings associated with all oriental names or images. In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles, or snakes. All this, and much more than I can say, the reader must enter into, before he can comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of

oriental imagery and mythological tortures impressed upon me. Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Hindostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia; Vishnu hated me; Seeva lay in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. Thousands of years I lived and was buried in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable abortions, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.

Some slight abstraction I thus attempt of my oriental dreams, which filled me always with such amazement at the monstrous scenery that horror seemed absorbed for a while in sheer astonishment. Sooner or later came a reflux of feeling that swallowed up the astonishment, and left me, not so much in terror, as in hatred and abomination of what I saw. Over every form, and threat, and punishment, and dim sightless incarceration, brooded a killing sense of eternity and infinity. Into these dreams only it was, with one or two slight exceptions, that any circumstances of physical horror entered. All before had been moral and spiritual terrors. But here the main agents were ugly birds, or snakes, or crocodiles, especially the last. The cursed crocodile became to me the object of more horror than all the rest. I was compelled to live with him; and (as was always the case in my dreams) for centuries. Sometimes I escaped, and found myself in Chinese houses. All the feet

of the tables, sofas, etc., soon became instinct with life: the abominable head of the crocodile, and his leering eyes, looked out at me, multiplied into ten thousand repetitions; and I stood loathing and fascinated. So often did this hideous reptile haunt my dreams, that many times the very same dream was broken up in the very same way: I heard gentle voices speaking to me (I hear everything when I am sleeping), and instantly I awoke; it was broad noon, and my children were standing, hand in hand, at my bedside, come to show me their coloured shoes, or new frocks, or to let me see them dressed for going out. No experience was so awful to me, and at the same time so pathetic, as this abrupt translation from the darkness of the infinite to the gaudy summer air of highest noon, and from the unutterable abortions of miscreated gigantic vermin to the sight of infancy, and innocent *human* natures.

June, 1819.—I have had occasion to remark, at various periods of my life, that the deaths of those whom we love, and, indeed, the contemplation of death generally, is (*caeteris paribus*) more affecting in summer than in any other season of the year. And the reasons are these three, I think: first, that the visible heavens in summer appear far higher, more distant, and (if such a solecism may be excused) more infinite; the clouds by which chiefly the eye expounds the distance of the blue pavilion stretched over our heads are in summer more voluminous, more massed, and are accumulated in far grander and more towering piles; secondly, the light and the appearances of the declining and the setting sun are much more fitted to be types and characters of the infinite; and, thirdly (which is the main reason), the exuberant and riotous prodigality of life naturally forces the mind more powerfully upon the antagonist thought of death, and the wintry sterility of the grave. For it may be observed generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other. On these accounts it is that I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am

walking alone in the endless days of summer; and any particular death, if not actually more affecting, at least haunts my mind more obstinately and besiegingly, in that season. Perhaps this cause, and a slight incident which I omit, might have been the immediate occasions of the following dream, to which, however, a predisposition must always have existed in my mind; but, having been once roused, it never left me, and split into a thousand fantastic variations, which often suddenly recombined, locked backed into startling unity, and restored the original dream.

I thought that it was a Sunday morning in May; that it was Easter Sunday, and as yet very early in the morning. I was standing, as it seemed to me, at the door of my own cottage. Right before me lay the very scene which could really be commanded from that situation, but exalted, as was usual, and solemnized by the power of dreams. There were the same mountains, and the same lovely valley at their feet; but the mountains were raised to more than Alpine height, and there was interspace far larger between them of savannahs and forest lawns; the hedges were rich with white roses; and no living creature was to be seen, excepting that in the green churchyard there were cattle tranquilly reposing upon the verdant graves, and particularly round about the grave of a child whom I had once tenderly loved, just as I had really beheld them, a little before sunrise, in the same summer when that child died. I gazed upon the well-known scene, and I said to myself, "It yet wants much of sunrise; and it is Easter Sunday; and that is the day on which they celebrate the first-fruits of Resurrection. I will walk abroad; old griefs shall be forgotten to-day; for the air is cool and still, and the hills are high, and stretch away to heaven; and the churchyard is as verdant as the forest lawns, and the forest lawns are as quiet as the churchyard; and with the dew I can wash the fever from my forehead; and then I shall be unhappy no longer." I turned, as if to open my garden gate, and immediately I saw upon the left a scene far different; but which yet the power of

dreams had reconciled into harmony. The scene was an oriental one; and there also it was Easter Sunday, and very early in the morning. And at a vast distance were visible, as a stain upon the horizon, the domes and cupolas of a great city—an image or faint abstraction, caught perhaps in childhood from some picture of Jerusalem. And not a bow-shot from me, upon a stone, shaded by Judean palms, there sat a woman; and I looked, and it was—Ann! She fixed her eyes upon me earnestly; and I said to her at length, “So, then, I have found you at last.” I waited; but she answered me not a word. Her face was the same as when I saw it last; the same, and yet, again, how different! Seventeen years ago, when the lamp-light of mighty London fell upon her face, as for the last time I kissed her lips (lips, Ann, that to me were not polluted!), her eyes were streaming with tears. The tears were no longer seen. Sometimes she seemed altered; yet again sometimes *not* altered; and hardly older. Her looks were tranquil, but with unusual solemnity of expression, and I now gazed upon her with some awe. Suddenly her countenance grew dim; and, turning to the mountains, I perceived vapours rolling between us; in a moment all had vanished; thick darkness came on; and in the twinkling of an eye I was far away from mountains, and by lamp-light in London, walking again with Ann—just as we had walked, when both children, eighteen years before, along the endless terraces of Oxford Street.

Then suddenly would come a dream of far different character—a tumultuous dream—commencing with a music such as now I often heard in sleep—music of preparation and of awakening suspense. The undulations of fast-gathering tumults were like the opening of the Coronation Anthem; and, like *that*, gave the feeling of a multitudinous movement, of infinite cavalcades filing off, and the tread of innumerable armies. The morning was come of a mighty day—a day of crisis and of ultimate hope for human nature, then suffering mysterious eclipse, and labouring in some dread extremity. Somewhere, but I knew not where—somehow, but I knew not

how—by some beings, but I knew not by whom—a battle, a strife, an agony, was travelling through all its stages—was evolving itself, like the catastrophe of some mighty drama, with which my sympathy was the more insupportable from deepening confusion as to its local scene, its cause, its nature, and its undecipherable issue. I (as is usual in dreams where, of necessity, we make ourselves central to every movement) had the power, and yet had not the power, to decide it. I had the power, if I could raise myself to will it; and yet again had not the power, for the weight of twenty Atlantics was upon me, or the oppression of inexpiable guilt. “Deeper than ever plummet sounded,” I lay inactive. Then, like a chorus, the passion deepened. Some greater interest was at stake, some mightier cause, than ever yet the sword had pleaded, or trumpet had proclaimed. Then came sudden alarms; hurryings to and fro; trepidations of innumerable fugitives, I knew not whether from the good cause or the bad; darkness and lights; tempest and human faces; and at last, with the sense that all was lost, female forms, and the features that were worth all the world to me; and but a moment allowed—and clasped hands with heart-breaking partings, and then—everlasting farewells! and, with a sigh such as the caves of hell sighed when the incestuous mother uttered the abhorred name of Death, the sound was reverberated—everlasting farewells! and again, and yet again reverberated—everlasting farewells!

And I awoke in struggles, and cried aloud, “I will sleep no more!”

Now, at last, I had become awestruck at the approach of sleep, under the condition of visions so afflicting, and so intensely lifelike as those which persecuted my phantom-haunted brain. More and more also I felt violent palpitations in some internal region, such as are commonly, but erroneously, called palpitations of the heart—being, as I suppose, referable exclusively to derangements in the stomach. These were evidently increasing rapidly in frequency and in strength. Naturally, therefore, on considering how important my life had become

to others besides myself, I became alarmed; and I paused seasonably; but with a difficulty that is past all description. Either way it seemed as though death had, in military language, "thrown himself astride of my path." Nothing short of mortal anguish, in a physical sense, it seemed, to wean myself from opium; yet, on the other hand, death through overwhelming nervous terrors—death by brain-fever or by lunacy—seemed too certainly to besiege the alternative course. Fortunately I had still so much of firmness left as to face that choice, which, with most of instant suffering, showed in the far distance a possibility of final escape.

This possibility was realised; I *did* accomplish my escape. And the issue of that particular stage in my opium experiences (for such it was—simply a provisional stage, that paved the way subsequently for many milder stages, to which gradually my constitutional system accommodated itself) was, pretty nearly in the following words, communicated to my readers in the earliest edition of these Confessions:—

I triumphed. But infer not, reader, from this word "*triumphed*," a condition of joy or exultation. Think of me as of one, even when four months had passed, still agitated, writhing, throbbing, palpitating, shattered; and much, perhaps, in the situation of him who has been racked, as I collect the torments of that state from the affecting account of them left by a most innocent sufferer (in the time of James I).¹ Meantime, I derived no benefit from any medicine whatever, except ammoniated tincture of valerian. The moral of the narrative is addressed to the opium-eater; and therefore, of necessity, limited in its application. If he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected. But he may say that the issue of my case is at least a proof that opium, after an eighteen years' use, and an eight years' abuse, of its powers, may

¹ William Lithgow. His book (*Travels, etc.*) is tedious and not well written; but the account of his own sufferings on the rack at Malaga, and, subsequently, is overpoweringly affecting. Less circumstantial, but the same in tendency, is the report of the results from torture published in 1830 by Juan Van Halen.

still be renounced; and that he may chance to bring to the task greater energy than I did, or that, with a stronger constitution, he may obtain the same results with less. This may be true; I would not presume to measure the efforts of other men by my own. Heartily I wish him more resolution; heartily I wish him an equal success. Nevertheless, I had motives external to myself which he may unfortunately want; and these supplied me with conscientious supports such as merely selfish interests might fail in supplying to a mind debilitated by opium.

Lord Bacon conjectures that it may be as painful to be born as to die. That seems probable; and, during the whole period of diminishing the opium, I had the torments of a man passing out of one mode of existence into another, and liable to the mixed or alternate pains of birth and death. The issue was not death, but a sort of physical regeneration; and I may add that ever since, at intervals, I have had a restoration of more than youthful spirits.

One memorial of my former condition, nevertheless, remains: my dreams are not calm; the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided; the legions that encamped in them are drawing off, but not departed; my sleep is still tumultuous; and, like the gates of Paradise to our first parents when looking back from afar, it is still (in the tremendous line of Milton)

With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms.

DREAMS AND FANTASIES

THE DAUGHTER OF LEBANON

[With the enlarged edition of the *Confessions* in 1856 De Quincey printed this short tale or apologue, avowedly as an illustrative specimen of the dreams and phantasms engendered under the influence of opium. The heroine, he suggested, might be regarded in some sort as a transfigured presentation of that lost Ann of Oxford Street, whose pathetic image glimmers fitfully through the pages of the *Confessions*, and played so large a part in the author's subsequent imaginings.]

DAMASCUS, first-born of cities, *Om el Denia*,¹ mother of generations, that wast before Abraham, that wast before the Pyramids! what sounds are those that, from a post-ern gate, looking eastwards over secret paths that wind away to the far distant desert, break the solemn silence of an oriental night? Whose voice is that which calls upon the spearmen, keeping watch for ever in the turret surmounting the gate, to receive him back into his Syrian home? Thou knowest him, Damascus, and hast known him in seasons of trouble as one learned in the afflictions of man; wise alike to take counsel for the suffering spirit or for the suffering body. The voice that breaks upon the night is the voice of a great evangelist—one of the four; and he is also a great physician. This do the

¹ "*Om el Denia*:"—Mother of the World is the Arabic title of Damascus. That it was before Abraham—*i. e.*, already an old establishment much more than a thousand years before the siege of Troy, and than two thousand years before our Christian era—may be inferred from Gen. xv, 2; and by the general consent of all eastern races, Damascus is accredited as taking precedency in age of all cities to the west of the Indus.

watchmen at the gate thankfully acknowledge, and joyfully they give him entrance. His sandals are white with dust; for he has been roaming for weeks beyond the desert, under the guidance of Arabs, on missions of hopeful benignity to Palmyra;¹ and in spirit he is weary of all things, except faithfulness to God, and burning love to man.

Eastern cities are asleep betimes; and sounds few or none fretted the quiet of all around him, as the evangelist paced onward to the market-place; but there another scene awaited him. On the right hand, in an upper chamber, with lattices widely expanded, sat a festal company of youths, revelling under a noonday blaze of light, from cressets and from bright tripods that burned fragrant woods—all joining in choral songs, all crowned with odorous wreaths from Daphne and the banks of the Orontes. Them the evangelist heeded not; but far away upon the left, close upon a sheltered nook, lighted up by a solitary vase of iron fretwork filled with cedar boughs, and hoisted high upon a spear, behold there sat a woman of loveliness so transcendent, that, when suddenly revealed, as now, out of deepest darkness, she appalled men as a mockery, or a birth of the air. Was she born of woman? Was it perhaps the angel—so the evangelist argued with himself—that met him in the desert after sunset, and strengthened him by secret talk? The evangelist went up, and touched her forehead; and when he found that she was indeed human, and guessed, from the station which she had chosen, that she waited for some one amongst this dissolute crew as her companion, he groaned heavily in spirit, and said, half to himself, but half to her, “Wert thou, poor ruined flower, adorned so divinely at thy birth—glorified in such excess, that not Solomon in all his pomp—no, nor even the lilies of the field—can approach thy gifts—only that thou shouldst grieve the Holy Spirit of God?” The woman trembled exceedingly, and said, “Rabbi, what should I do? For

¹ Palmyra had not yet reached its meridian splendour of Grecian development, as afterwards near the age of Aurelian, but it was already a noble city.

behold! all men forsake me." The evangelist mused a little, and then secretly to himself he said, "Now will I search this woman's heart—whether in very truth it inclineth itself to God, and hath strayed only before fiery compulsion." Turning therefore to the woman, the Prophet¹ said, "Listen: I am the messenger of Him whom thou hast not known; of Him that made Lebanon and the cedars of Lebanon; that made the sea, and the heavens, and the host of the stars; that made the light; that made the darkness; that blew the spirit of life into the nostrils of man. His messenger I am: and from Him all power is given me to bind and to loose, to build and to pull down. Ask, therefore, whatsoever thou wilt—great or small—and through me thou shalt receive it from God. But, my child, ask not amiss. For God is able out of thine own evil asking to weave snares for thy footing. And oftentimes to the lambs whom He loves, He gives by seeming to refuse; gives in some better sense, or" (and his voice swelled into the power of anthems) "in some far happier world. Now, therefore, my daughter, be wise on thine own behalf; and say what it is that I shall ask for thee from God." But the Daughter of Lebanon needed not his caution; for immediately dropping on one knee to God's ambassador, whilst the full radiance from the cedar torch fell upon the glory of a penitential eye, she raised her clasped hands in supplication, and said, in answer to the evangelist asking for a second time what gift he should call down upon her from Heaven, "Lord, that thou wouldest

¹ "*The Prophet:*"—Though a Prophet was not *therefore* and in virtue of that character an Evangelist, yet every Evangelist was necessarily in the scriptural sense a Prophet. For let it be remembered that a Prophet did not mean a *Predicter*, or *Foreshower* of events, except derivatively and inferentially. What *was* a Prophet in the uniform scriptural sense? He was a man, who drew aside the curtain from the secret counsels of Heaven. He declared, or made public, the previously hidden truths of God: and because future events might chance to involve divine truth, therefore a revealer of future events might happen so far to be a Prophet. Yet still small was that part of a Prophet's functions which concerned the foreshowing of events; and not necessarily *any* part.

put me back into my father's house." And the evangelist, because he was human, dropped a tear as he stooped to kiss her forehead, saying, "Daughter, thy prayer is heard in heaven; and I tell thee that the daylight shall not come and go for thirty times, not for the thirtieth time shall the sun drop behind Lebanon, before I will put thee back into thy father's house."

Thus the lovely lady came into the guardianship of the evangelist. She sought not to varnish her history, or to palliate her own transgressions. In so far as she had offended at all, her case was that of millions in every generation. Her father was a prince in Lebanon, proud, unforgiving, austere. The wrongs done to his daughter by her dishonourable lover, because done under favour of opportunities created by her confidence in his integrity, her father persisted in resenting as wrongs done by this injured daughter herself; and, refusing to her all protection, drove her, whilst yet confessedly innocent, into criminal compliances under sudden necessities of seeking daily bread from her own uninstructed efforts. Great was the wrong she suffered both from father and lover; great was the retribution. She lost a churlish father and a wicked lover; she gained an apostolic guardian. She lost a princely station in Lebanon; she gained an early heritage in heaven. For this heritage is hers within thirty days, if she will not defeat it herself. And, whilst the stealthy motion of time travelled towards this thirtieth day, behold! a burning fever desolated Damascus, which also laid its arrest upon the Daughter of Lebanon, yet gently, and so that hardly for an hour did it withdraw her from the heavenly teachings of the evangelist. And thus daily the doubt was strengthened—would the holy apostle suddenly touch her with his hand, and say, "Woman, be thou whole!" or would he present her on the thirtieth day as a pure bride to Christ? But perfect freedom belongs to Christian service, and she only must make the election.

Up rose the sun on the thirtieth morning in all his pomp, but suddenly was darkened by driving storms. Not until noon was the heavenly orb again revealed; then

the glorious light was again unmasked, and again the Syrian valleys rejoiced. This was the hour already appointed for the baptism of the new Christian daughter. Heaven and earth shed gratulation on the happy festival; and, when all was finished, under an awning raised above the level roof of her dwelling-house, the regenerate Daughter of Lebanon, looking over the rose-gardens of Damascus, with amplest prospect of her native hills, lay in blissful trance, making proclamation, by her white baptismal robes, of recovered innocence and of reconciliation with God. And, when the sun was declining to the west, the evangelist, who had sat from noon by the bedside of his spiritual daughter, rose solemnly, and said, "Lady of Lebanon, the day is already come, and the hour is coming, in which my covenant must be fulfilled with thee. Wilt thou, therefore, being now wiser in thy thoughts, suffer God thy new Father to give by seeming to refuse; to give in some better sense, or in some far happier world?" But the Daughter of Lebanon sorrowed at these words; she yearned after her native hills; not for themselves, but because there it was that she had left that sweet twin-born sister, with whom from infant days hand-in-hand she had wandered amongst the everlasting cedars. And again the evangelist sat down by her bedside; whilst she by intervals communed with him, and by intervals slept gently under the oppression of her fever. But as evening drew nearer, and it wanted now but a brief space to the going down of the sun, once again, and with deeper solemnity, the evangelist rose to his feet, and said, "O daughter! this is the thirtieth day, and the sun is drawing near to his rest; brief, therefore, is the time within which I must fulfil the word that God spoke to thee by me." Then, because light clouds of delirium were playing about her brain, he raised his pastoral staff, and pointing it to her temples, rebuked the clouds, and bade that no more they should trouble her vision, or stand between her and the forests of Lebanon. And the delirious clouds parted asunder, breaking away to the right and to the left. But upon the forests of Lebanon there hung a mighty mass of

overshadowing vapours, bequeathed by the morning's storm. And a second time the evangelist raised his pastoral staff, and, pointing it to the gloomy vapours, rebuked them, and bade that no more they should stand between his daughter and her father's house. And immediately the dark vapours broke away from Lebanon to the right and to the left; and the farewell radiance of the sun lighted up all the paths that ran between the everlasting cedars and her father's palace.

But vainly the lady of Lebanon searched every path with her eyes for memorials of her sister. And the evangelist, pitying her sorrow, turned away her eyes to the clear blue sky, which the departing vapours had exposed. And he showed her the peace which was there. And then he said, "O daughter! this also is but a mask." And immediately for the third time he raised his pastoral staff, and, pointing it to the fair blue sky, he rebuked it, and bade that no more it should stand between her and the vision of God. Immediately the blue sky parted to the right and to the left, laying bare the infinite revelations that can be made visible only to dying eyes. And the Daughter of Lebanon said to the evangelist, "O father! what armies are these that I see mustering within the infinite chasm?" And the evangelist replied, "These are the armies of Christ, and they are mustering to receive some dear human blossom, some first-fruits of Christian faith, that shall rise this night to Christ from Damascus." Suddenly, as thus the child of Lebanon gazed upon the mighty vision, she saw bending forward from the heavenly host, as if in gratulation to herself, the one countenance for which she hungered and thirsted. The twin-sister, that should have waited for her in Lebanon, had died of grief, and was waiting for her in Paradise. Immediately in rapture she soared upwards from her couch; immediately in weakness she fell back; and being caught by the evangelist, she flung her arms around his neck; whilst he breathed into her ear his final whisper, "Wilt thou now suffer that God should give by seeming to refuse?"—"Oh yes—yes—yes," was the fervent answer from the Daughter of Lebanon. Immediately the evan-

gelist gave the signal to the heavens, and the heavens gave the signal to the sun; and in one minute after the Daughter of Lebanon had fallen back a marble corpse amongst her white baptismal robes; the solar orb dropped behind Lebanon; and the evangelist, with eyes glorified by mortal and immortal tears, rendered thanks to God that had thus accomplished the word which he spoke through himself to the Magdalen of Lebanon—that not for the thirtieth time should the sun go down behind her native hills, before he had put her back into her Father's house.

SUSPIRIA DE PROFUNDIS

[The mood in which he closed the *Confessions*—the mood of reproducing or constructing dreams in “impassioned prose”—pursued De Quincey through life. Twenty-four years afterwards, in 1845, he began in *Blackwood's Magazine* a series of dream-fantasies under the title *Suspiria de Profundis; being a sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. It was left in a fragmentary unfinished condition, and was broken up by De Quincey when preparing his Collective Edition. But as it now stands the series contains half-a-dozen short papers which are among the finest examples of De Quincey's or anybody else's English style. *Levana* may perhaps be called a mere exercise in literary mythology; when you come to peer closely at them our Ladies of Sorrow may not look quite so mysterious and so awful as they seemed at the first reading. But the description of them is a magnificent piece of writing, the supreme example of De Quincey's power of appealing to the imagination and the emotions, particularly the emotions of awe and pathos, in a rhythmical prose which has all the elements of poetry except the metrical form. And for that he found a substitute in the elaborated musical rhythm that beats through every sentence and welds the whole piece into a majestic symphony.]

VISION OF LIFE

UPON me, as upon others scattered thinly by tens and twenties over every thousand years, fell too powerfully and too early the vision of life. The horror of life mixed itself already in earliest youth with the heavenly sweetness of life; that grief, which one in a hundred has sensi-

bility enough to gather from the sad retrospect of life in its closing stage, for me shed its dew as a prelibation upon the fountains of life whilst yet sparkling to the morning sun. I saw from afar and from before what I was to see from behind. Is this the description of an early youth passed in the shades of gloom? No, but of a youth passed in the divinest happiness. And if the reader has (which so few have) the passion, without which there is no reading of the legend and superscription upon man's brow, if he is not (as most are) deaf than the grave to every *deep* note that sighs upwards from the Delphic caves of human life, he will know that the rapture of life (or anything which by approach can merit that name) does not arise, unless as perfect music arises—music of Mozart or Beethoven—by the confluence of the mighty and terrific discords with the subtle concords. Not by contrast, or as reciprocal foils, do these elements act, which is the feeble conception of many, but by union. They are the sexual forces in music: "male and female created he them;" and these mighty antagonists do not put forth their hostilities by repulsion, but by deepest attraction.

As "in to-day already walks to-morrow," so in the past experience of a youthful life may be seen dimly the future. The collisions with alien interests or hostile views, of a child, boy, or very young man, so insulated as each of these is sure to be,—those aspects of opposition which such a person *can* occupy, are limited by the exceedingly few and trivial lines of connection along which he is able to radiate any essential influence whatever upon the fortunes or happiness of others. Circumstances may magnify his importance for the moment; but, after all, any cable which he carries out upon other vessels is easily slipped upon a feud arising. Far otherwise is the state of relations connecting an adult or responsible man with the circles around him as life advances. The network of these relations is a thousand times more intricate, the jarring of these intricate relations a thousand times more frequent, and the vibrations a thousand times harsher which these jarrings diffuse.

This truth is felt beforehand misgivingly and in troubled vision, by a young man who stands upon the threshold of manhood. One earliest instinct of fear and horror would darken his spirit, if it could be revealed to itself and self-questioned at the moment of birth: a second instinct of the same nature would again pollute that tremulous mirror, if the moment were as punctually marked as physical birth is marked, which dismisses him finally upon the tides of absolute self-control. A dark ocean would seem the total expanse of life from the first: but far darker and more appalling would seem that inferior and second chamber of the ocean which called him away for ever from the direct accountability of others. Dreadful would be the morning which should say, "Be thou a human child incarnate;" but more dreadful the morning which should say, "Bear thou henceforth the sceptre of thy self-dominion through life, and the passion of life!" Yes, dreadful would be both; but without a basis of the dreadful there is no perfect rapture. It is a part through the sorrow of life, growing out of dark events, that this basis of awe and solemn darkness slowly accumulates. *That* I have illustrated. But, as life expands, it is more through the *strife* which besets us, strife from conflicting opinions, positions, passions, interests, that the funereal ground settles and deposits itself, which sends upward the dark lustrous brilliancy through the jewel of life—else revealing a pale and superficial glitter. Either the human being must suffer and struggle as the price of a more searching vision, or his gaze must be shallow, and without intellectual revelation.

LEVANA AND OUR LADIES OF SORROW

OFTENTIMES at Oxford I saw Levana in my dreams. I knew her by her Roman symbols. Who is Levana? Reader, that do not pretend to have leisure for very much scholarship, you will not be angry with me for telling you. Levana was the Roman goddess that performed for the newborn infant the earliest office of en-

nobling kindness—typical, by its mode of that grandeur which belongs to man everywhere, and of the benignity in powers invisible which even in Pagan worlds sometimes descends to sustain it. At the very moment of birth, just as the infant tasted for the first time the atmosphere of our troubled planet, it was laid on the ground. *That* might bear different interpretations. But immediately, lest so grand a creature should grovel there for more than one instant, either the paternal hand, as proxy for the goddess Levana, or some near kinsman, as proxy for the father, raised it upright, bade it look erect as king of all this world, and presented its forehead to the stars, saying, perhaps, in his heart, “Behold what is greater than yourselves!” This symbolic act represented the function of Levana. And that mysterious lady, who never revealed her face (except to me in dreams), but always acted by delegation, had her name from the Latin verb (as still it is the Italian verb) *levare*, to raise aloft.

This is the explanation of Levana. And hence it has arisen that some people have understood by Levana the tutelary power that controls the education of the nursery. She, that would not suffer at his birth even a prefigurative or mimic degradation for her awful ward, far less could be supposed to suffer the real degradation attaching to the non-development of his powers. She therefore watches over human education. Now, the word *edūco*, with the penultimate short, was derived (by a process often exemplified in the crystallisation of languages) from the word *edūco*, with the penultimate long. Whatsoever educes or develops—*educates*. By the education of Levana, therefore, is meant—not the poor machinery that moves by spelling-books and grammars, but by that mighty system of central forces hidden in the deep bosom of human life, which by passion, by strife, by temptation, by the energies of resistance, works for ever upon children—resting not day or night, any more than the mighty wheel of day and night themselves, whose moments, like restless spokes, are glimmering for ever as they revolve.

If, then, *these* are the ministries by which Levana works, how profoundly must she reverence the agencies of grief! But you, reader! think—that children generally are not liable to grief such as mine. There are two senses in the word *generally*—the sense of Euclid, where it means *universally* (or in the whole extent of the *genus*), and a foolish sense of this world, where it means *usually*. Now, I am far from saying that children universally are capable of grief like mine. But there are many more than you ever heard of, who die of grief in this island of ours. I will tell you a common case. The rules of Eton require that a boy on the *foundation* should be there twelve years: he is superannuated at eighteen, consequently he must come at six. Children torn away from mothers and sisters at that age not unfrequently die. I speak of what I know. The complaint is not entered by the registrar as grief; but *that* it is. Grief of that sort, and at that age, has killed more than ever have been counted amongst its martyrs.

Therefore it is that Levana often communes with the powers that shake man's heart: therefore it is that she dotes upon grief. "These ladies," said I softly to myself, on seeing the ministers with whom Levana was conversing, "these are the Sorrows; and they are three in number, as the *Graces* are three, who dress man's life with beauty; the *Parcae* are three, who weave the dark arras of man's life in their mysterious loom always with colours sad in part, sometimes angry with tragic crimson and black; the *Furies* are three, who visit with retributions called from the other side of the grave offences that walk upon this; and once even the *Muses* were but three, who fit the harp, the trumpet, or the lute, to the great burdens of man's impassioned creations. These are the Sorrows, all three of whom I know." The last words I say *now*; but in Oxford I said, "one of whom I know, and the others too surely I *shall* know." For already, in my fervent youth, I saw (dimly relieved upon the dark background of my dreams) the imperfect lineaments of the awful sisters. These sisters—by what name shall we call them?

If I say simply—"The Sorrows," there will be a chance of mistaking the term; it might be understood of individual sorrow—separate cases of sorrow—whereas I want a term expressing the mighty abstractions that incarnate themselves in all individual sufferings of man's heart; and I wish to have these abstractions presented as impersonations, that is, as clothed with human attributes of life, and with functions pointing to flesh. Let us call them, therefore, *Our Ladies of Sorrow*. I know them thoroughly, and have walked in all their kingdoms. Three sisters they are, of one mysterious household; and their paths are wide apart, but of their dominion there is no end. Them I saw often conversing with Levana, and sometimes about myself. Do they talk, then? Oh, no! Mighty phantoms like these disdain the infirmities of language. They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves is no voice nor sound—eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. They spoke not as they talked with Levana. They whispered not. They sang not. Though oftentimes methought they *might* have sung; for I upon earth had heard their mysteries oftentimes deciphered by harp and timbrel, by dulcimer and organ. Like God, whose servants they are, they utter their pleasure, not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven—by changes on earth—by pulses in secret rivers—heraldries painted on darkness, and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain. *They* wheeled in mazes; *I* spelled the steps. *They* telegraphed from afar; *I* read the signals. *They* conspired together; and on the mirrors of darkness *my* eye traced the plots. *Theirs* were the symbols,—*mine* are the words.

What is it that the sisters are? What is it that they do? Let me describe their form, and their presence; if form it were that still fluctuated in its outline; or presence it were that for ever advanced to the front, or for ever receded amongst shades.

The eldest of the three is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, Our Lady of Tears. She it is that night and day raves

and moans, calling for vanished faces. She stood in Rama, where a voice was heard of lamentation—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted. She it was that stood in Bethlehem on the night when Herod's sword swept its nurseries of Innocents, and the little feet were stiffened for ever, which, heard at times as they tottered along floors overhead, woke pulses of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven.

Her eyes are sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy by turns; oftentimes rising to the clouds, oftentimes challenging the heavens. She wears a diadem round her head. And I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies or the thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds. This sister, the elder, it is that carries keys more than Papal at her girdle, which open every cottage and every palace. She, to my knowledge, sate all last summer by the bedside of the blind beggar, him that so often and so gladly I talked with, whose pious daughter, eight years old, with the sunny countenance, resisted the temptations of play and village mirth to travel all day long on dusty roads with her afflicted father. For this did God send her a great reward. In the spring time of the year, and whilst yet her own spring was budding, He recalled her to Himself. But her blind father mourns for ever over *her*; still he dreams at midnight that the little guiding hand is locked within his own; and still he wakens to a darkness that is *now* within a second and a deeper darkness. This *Mater Lachrymarum* also has been sitting all this winter of 1844-5 within the bedchamber of the Czar, bringing before his eyes a daughter (not less pious) that vanished to God not less suddenly, and left behind her a darkness not less profound. By the power of her keys it is that Our Lady of Tears glides a ghostly intruder into the chambers of sleepless men, sleepless women, sleepless children, from Ganges to the Nile, from Nile to Mississippi. And her, because she is the first-born of her house, and has the widest empire, let us honour with the title of "Madonna."

The second sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs. She never scales the clouds, nor walks abroad upon the winds. She wears no diadem. And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet or subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams, and with wrecks of forgotten delirium. But she raises not her eyes; her head, on which sits a dilapidated turban, droops for ever; for ever fastens on the dust. She weeps not. She groans not. But she sighs inaudibly at intervals. Her sister, Madonna, is oftentimes stormy and frantic; raging in the highest against heaven; and demanding back her darlings. But Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless. Murmur she may, but it is in her sleep. Whisper she may, but it is to herself in the twilight. Mutter she does at times, but it is in solitary places that are desolate as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to his rest. This sister is the visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in the Mediterranean galleys, of the English criminal in Norfolk Island, blotted out from the books of remembrance in sweet far-off England, of the baffled penitent reverting his eyes for ever upon a solitary grave, which to him seems the altar overthrown of some past and bloody sacrifice, on which altar no oblations can now be availing, whether towards pardon that he might implore, or towards reparation that he might attempt. Every slave that at noonday looks up to the tropical sun with timid reproach, as he points with one hand to the earth, our general mother, but for *him* a step-mother, as he points with the other hand to the Bible, our general teacher, but against *him* sealed and sequestered;¹—every woman sitting in darkness, without love to shelter her

¹ This, the reader will be aware, applies chiefly to the cotton and tobacco States of North America; but not to them only; on which account I have not scrupled to figure the sun, which looks down upon slavery as *tropical*—no matter if strictly within the tropics, or simply so near to them as to produce a similar climate.

head, or hope to illumine her solitude, because the heaven-born instincts kindling in her nature germs of holy affections, which God implanted in her womanly bosom, having been stifled by social necessities, now burn sullenly to waste, like sepulchral lamps amongst the ancients;—every nun defrauded of her unreturning May-time by wicked kinsmen, whom God will judge;—every captive in every dungeon;—all that are betrayed, and all that are rejected; outcasts by traditionary law, and children of *hereditary* disgrace—all these walk with “Our Lady of Sighs.” She also carries a key; but she needs it little. For her kingdom is chiefly amongst the tents of Shem, and the houseless vagrant of every clime. Yet in the very highest ranks of man she finds chapels of her own; and even in glorious England there are some that, to the world, carry their heads as proudly as the reindeer, who yet secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads.

But the third sister, who is also the youngest!—Hush! whisper whilst we talk of *her*! Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers—for noon of day or for noon of night—for ebbing or for flowing tide—may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power; but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions; in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with a tiger’s leaps. She

carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*—Our Lady of Darkness.

These were the *Semnai Theai*, or Sublime Goddesses;¹ these were the *Eumenides* or Gracious Ladies, (so called by antiquity in shuddering propitiation)—of my Oxford dreams. MADONNA spoke. She spoke by her mysterious hand. Touching my head, she beckoned to Our Lady of Sighs; and *what* she spoke, translated out of the signs, which (except in dreams) no man reads, was this:—

“Lo! here is he whom in childhood I dedicated to my altars. This is he that once I made my darling. Him I led astray, him I beguiled, and from heaven I stole away his young heart to mine. Through me did he become idolatrous; and through me it was, by languishing desires, that he worshipped the worm, and prayed to the wormy grave. Holy was the grave to him; lovely was its darkness; saintly its corruption. Him, this young idolater, I have seasoned for thee, dear gentle Sister of Sighs! Do thou take him now to *thy* heart, and season him for our dreadful Sister. And thou”—turning to the *Mater Tenebrarum*, she said—“wicked sister, that temptest and hatest, do thou take him from *her*. See that thy sceptre lie heavy on his head. Suffer not woman and her tenderness to sit near him in his darkness. Banish the frailties of hope—wither the relenting of love—scorch the fountains of tears: curse him as only thou canst curse. So shall he be accomplished in the furnace—so shall he see the things that ought *not* to be seen—sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable. So shall he read elder truths, sad truths, grand truths, fearful truths. So shall he rise again *before* he dies. And so shall our commission be accomplished which from God we had—to plague his heart until we had unfolded the capacities of his spirit.”

¹ “*Sublime Goddesses.*”—The word *σεμνός* is usually rendered *venerable* in dictionaries; not a very flattering epithet for females. But I am disposed to think that it comes nearest to our idea of the *sublime*; as near as a Greek word *could* come.

THE ENGLISH MAIL-COACH

[To the "Dream" series belongs, at least in intention and aim, the papers called "The English Mail-Coach," contributed under separate headings to *Blackwood* in October and December, 1849, and put together under their present title in the Collective Edition. De Quincey, in an Appendix, explained that once when travelling by coach he had become the "witness of an appalling scene which threatened instant death in a shape most terrific to two young people"—in fact the coach might have, but apparently did not, run into a trap carrying a young lady and gentleman. This "dreadful scene" was transformed by De Quincey into a dream, "as tumultuous and clanging as a musical fugue." To lead up to this he describes the English mail-coach in the days of its greatest glory, when it was carrying through the land the news of the victories won over the French.]

THE GLORY OF MOTION

SOME twenty or more years before I matriculated at Oxford, Mr. Palmer, at that time M.P. for Bath, had accomplished two things, very hard to do on our little planet, the Earth, however cheap they may be held by eccentric people in comets—he had invented mail-coaches, and he had married the daughter¹ of a duke. He was, therefore, just twice as great a man as Galileo, who did certainly invent (or, which is the same thing,² discover) the satellites of Jupiter, those very next things extant to mail-coaches in the two capital pretensions of speed and keeping time, but, on the other hand, who did *not* marry the daughter of a duke.

These mail-coaches, as organised by Mr. Palmer, are entitled to a circumstantial notice from myself, having had so large a share in developing the anarchies of my subsequent dreams; an agency which they accomplished, 1st, through velocity, at that time unprecedented—for

¹ Lady Madeline Gordon.

² "*The same thing*:"—Thus, in the calendar of the Church Festivals, the discovery of the true cross (by Helen, the mother of Constantine) is recorded (and one might think—with the express consciousness of sarcasm) as the *Invention* of the Cross.

they first revealed the glory of motion; 2dly, through grand effects for the eye between lamp-light and the darkness upon solitary roads; 3dly, through animal beauty and power so often displayed in the class of horses selected for this mail service; 4thly, through the conscious presence of a central intellect, that, in the midst of vast distances¹—of storms, of darkness, of danger—overruled all obstacles into one steady co-operation to a national result. For my own feeling, this post-office service spoke as by some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, brain, and lungs, in a healthy animal organisation. But, finally, that particular element in this whole combination which most impressed myself, and through which it is that to this hour Mr. Palmer's mail-coach system tyrannises over my dreams by terror and terrific beauty, lay in the awful *political* mission which at that time it fulfilled. The mail-coach it was that distributed over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo. These were the harvests that, in the grandeur of their reaping, redeemed the tears and blood in which they had been sown. Neither was the meanest peasant so much below the grandeur and the sorrow of the times as to confound battles such as these, which were gradually moulding the destinies of Christendom, with the vulgar conflicts of ordinary warfare, so often no more than gladiatorial trials of national prowess. The victories of England in this stupendous contest rose of themselves as natural *Te Deums* to heaven; and it was felt by the thoughtful that such victories, at such a crisis of general prostration, were not more beneficial to

¹ "*Vast distances:*"—One case was familiar to mail-coach travellers, where two mails in opposite directions, north and south, starting at the same minute from points six hundred miles apart, met almost constantly at a particular bridge which bisected the total distance.

ourselves than finally to France, our enemy, and to the nations of all western or central Europe, through whose pusillanimity it was that the French domination had prospered.

* * * * *

The modern modes of travelling cannot compare with the old mail-coach system in grandeur and power. They boast of more velocity, not, however, as a consciousness, but as a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon *alien* evidence; as, for instance, because somebody *says* that we have gone fifty miles in the hour, though we are far from feeling it as a personal experience, or upon the evidence of a result, as that actually we find ourselves in York four hours after leaving London. Apart from such an assertion, or such a result, I myself am little aware of the pace. But, seated on the old mail-coach, we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity. On this system the word was, *Non magna loquimur*, as upon railways, but *vivimus*. Yes, "*magna vivimus*;" we do not make verbal ostentation of our grandeurs, we realise our grandeurs in act, and in the very experience of life. The vital experience of the glad animal sensibilities made doubts impossible on the question of our speed; we heard our speed; we saw it, we felt it as a thrilling; and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of the noblest amongst brutes, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and thunder-beating hoofs. The sensibility of the horse, uttering itself in the maniac light of his eye, might be the last vibration of such a movement; the glory of Salamanca might be the first. But the intervening links that connected them, that spread the earthquake of battle into the eyeball of the horse, were the heart of man and its electric thrillings—kindling in the rapture of the fiery strife, and then propagating its own tumults by contagious shouts and gestures to the heart of his servant the horse.

But now, on the new system of travelling, iron tubes

and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion. Nile nor Trafalgar has power to raise an extra bubble in a steam-kettle. The galvanic cycle is broken up for ever; man's imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse; the inter-agencies are gone in the modé of communication between the horse and his master, out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity under accidents of mists that hid, or sudden blazes that revealed, of mobs that agitated, or midnight solitudes that awed. Tidings, fitted to convulse all nations, must henceforwards travel by culinary process; and the trumpet that once announced from afar the laurelled mail, heart-shaking, when heard screaming on the wind, and proclaiming itself through the darkness to every village or solitary house on its route, has now given way for ever to the pot-walloppings of the boiler.

Thus have perished multiform openings for public expressions of interest, scenical yet natural, in great national tidings; for revelations of faces and groups that could not offer themselves amongst the fluctuating mobs of a railway station. The gatherings of gazers about a laurelled mail had one centre, and acknowledged one sole interest. But the crowds attending at a railway station have as little unity as running water, and own as many centres as there are separate carriages in the train.

How else, for example, than as a constant watcher for the dawn, and for the London mail that in summer months entered about daybreak amongst the lawny thickets of Marlborough forest, couldst thou, sweet Fanny of the Bath road, have become the glorified inmate of my dreams? Yet Fanny, as the loveliest young woman for face and person that perhaps in my whole life I have beheld, merited the station which even now, from a distance of forty years, she holds in my dreams; yes, though by links of natural association she brings along with her a troop of dreadful creatures, fabulous and not fabulous, that are more abominable to the heart, than Fanny and the dawn are delightful.

Miss Fanny of the Bath road, strictly speaking, lived at a mile's distance from that road; but came so continually to meet the mail, that I on my frequent transits rarely missed her, and naturally connected her image with the great thoroughfare where only I had ever seen her. Why she came so punctually, I do not exactly know; but I believe with some burden of commissions to be executed in Bath, which had gathered to her own residence as a central rendezvous for converging them. The mail-coachman who drove the Bath mail, and wore the royal livery,¹ happened to be Fanny's grandfather. A good man he was, that loved his beautiful granddaughter; and, loving her wisely, was vigilant over her deportment in any case where young Oxford might happen to be concerned. Did my vanity then suggest that I myself, individually, could fall within the line of his terrors? Certainly not, as regarded any physical pretensions that I could plead; for Fanny (as a chance passenger from her own neighbourhood once told me) counted in her train a hundred and ninety-nine professed admirers, if not open aspirants to her favour; and probably not one of the whole brigade but excelled myself in personal advantages. Ulysses even, with the unfair advantage of his accursed bow, could hardly have undertaken that amount of suitors. So the danger might have seemed slight—only that woman is universally aristocratic; it is amongst her nobilities of heart that she is so. Now, the aristocratic distinctions in my favour might easily with Miss Fanny have compensated my physical deficiencies. Did I then make love to Fanny? Why, yes; about as much love as one *could* make whilst

¹ "*Wore the royal livery.*"—The general impression was, that the royal livery belonged of right to the mail-coachmen as their professional dress. But that was an error. To the guard it *did* belong, I believe, and was obviously essential as an official warrant, and as a means of instant identification for his person, in the discharge of his important public duties. But the coachman, and especially if his place in the series did not connect him immediately with London and the General Post-office, obtained the scarlet coat only as an honorary distinction after long (or, if not long, trying and special) service.

the mail was changing horses—a process which, ten years later, did not occupy above eighty seconds; but *then*—viz., about Waterloo—it occupied five times eighty. Now, four hundred seconds offer a field quite ample enough for whispering into a young woman's ear a great deal of truth, and (by way of parenthesis) some trifle of falsehood. Grandpapa did right, therefore, to watch me. And yet, as happens too often to the grandpapas of earth, in a contest with the admirers of granddaughters, how vainly would he have watched me had I meditated any evil whispers to Fanny! She, it is my belief, would have protected herself against any man's evil suggestions. But he, as the result showed, could not have intercepted the opportunities for such suggestions. Yet, why not? Was he not active? Was he not blooming? Blooming he was as Fanny herself.

Say, all our praises why should lords—

Stop, that's not the line.

Say, all our roses why should girls engross?

The coachman showed rosy blossoms on his face deeper even than his granddaughter's—*his* being drawn from the ale cask, Fanny's from the fountains of the dawn. But, in spite of his blooming face, some infirmities he had; and one particularly in which he too much resembled a crocodile. This lay in a monstrous inaptitude for turning round. The crocodile, I presume, owes that inaptitude to the absurd *length* of his back; but in our grandpapa it arose rather from the absurd *breadth* of his back, combined, possibly, with some growing stiffness in his legs. Now, upon this crocodile infirmity of his I planted a human advantage for tendering my homage to Miss Fanny. In defiance of all his honourable vigilance, no sooner had he presented to us his mighty Jovian back (what a field for displaying to mankind his royal scarlet!), whilst inspecting professionally the buckles, the straps, and the silvery turrets¹ of his har-

¹ "Turrets:"—As one who loves and venerates Chaucer for his unrivalled merits of tenderness, of picturesque characterisation,

ness, than I raised Miss Fanny's hand to my lips, and, by the mixed tenderness and respectfulness of my manner, caused her easily to understand how happy it would make me to rank upon her list as No. 10 or 12, in which case a few casualties amongst her lovers (and observe, they *hanged* liberally in those days) might have promoted me speedily to the top of the tree; as, on the other hand, with how much loyalty of submission I acquiesced by anticipation in her award, supposing that she should plant me in the very rear-ward of her favour, as No. 199 + 1. Most truly I loved this beautiful and ingenuous girl; and had it not been for the Bath mail, timing all courtships by post-office allowance, heaven only knows what might have come of it. People talk of being over head and ears in love; now, the mail was the cause that I sank only over ears in love, which, you know, still left a trifle of brain to overlook the whole conduct of the affair.

Ah, reader! when I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change—all things perish. "Perish the roses and the palms of kings:" perish even the crowns and trophies of Waterloo: thunder and lightning are not the thunder and lightning which I remember. Roses are degenerating. The Fannies of our island—though this I say with reluctance—are not visibly improving; and the Bath road is notoriously superannuated.

GOING DOWN WITH VICTORY

But the grandest chapter of our experience, within the whole mail-coach service, was on those occasions when we went down from London with the news of victory. A period of about ten years stretched from Trafalgar

and of narrative skill, I noticed with great pleasure that the word *torrettes* is used by him to designate the little devices through which the reins are made to pass. This same word, in the same exact sense, I heard uniformly used by many scores of illustrious mail-coachmen, to whose confidential friendship I had the honour of being admitted in my younger days.

to Waterloo; the second and third years of which period (1806 and 1807) were comparatively sterile; but the other nine (from 1805 to 1815 inclusively) furnished a long succession of victories; the least of which, in such a contest of Titans, had an inappreciable value of position—partly for its absolute interference with the plans of our enemy, but still more from its keeping alive through central Europe the sense of a deep-seated vulnerability in France. Even to tease the coasts of our enemy, to mortify them by continual blockades, to insult them by capturing if it were but a baubling schooner under the eyes of their arrogant armies, repeated from time to time a sullen proclamation of power lodged in one quarter to which the hopes of Christendom turned in secret. How much more loudly must this proclamation have spoken in the audacity¹ of having bearded the *élite* of their troops, and having beaten them in pitched battles! Five years of life it was worth paying down for the privilege of an outside place on a mail-coach, when carrying down the first tidings of any such event. And it is to be noted that, from our insular situation, and the multitude of our frigates disposable for the rapid transmission of intelligence, rarely did any unauthorised rumour steal away a prelibation from the first aroma of the regular despatches. The government news was generally the earliest news.

From eight P.M., to fifteen or twenty minutes later,

¹ "*Audacity*:"—Such the French accounted it; and it has struck me that Soult would not have been so popular in London, at the period of her present Majesty's coronation, or in Manchester, on occasion of his visit to that town, if they had been aware of the insolence with which he spoke of us in notes written at intervals from the field of Waterloo. As though it had been mere felony in our army to look a French one in the face, he said in more notes than one, dated from two to four P.M. on the field of Waterloo, "Here are the English—we have them; they are caught *en flagrant delit*." Yet no man should have known us better; no man had drunk deeper from the cup of humiliation than Soult had in 1809, when ejected by us with headlong violence from Oporto, and pursued through a long line of wrecks to the frontier of Spain; subsequently at Albuera, in the bloodiest of recorded battles, to say nothing of Toulouse, he should have learned our pretensions.

imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street, where, at that time,¹ and not in St. Martin's-le-Grand, was seated the General Post-office. In what exact strength we mustered I do not remember; but, from the length of each separate *attelage*, we filled the street, though a long one, and though we were drawn up in double file. On *any* night the spectacle was beautiful. The absolute perfection of all the appointments about the carriages and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanliness, their beautiful simplicity—but, more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses—were what might first have fixed the attention. Every carriage, on every morning in the year, was taken down to an official inspector for examination—wheels, axles, linchpins, pole, glasses, lamps, were all critically probed and tested. Every part of every carriage had been cleaned, every horse had been groomed, with as much rigour as if they belonged to a private gentleman; and that part of the spectacle offered itself always. But the night before us is a night of victory; and, behold! to the ordinary display, what a heart-shaking addition!—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons. The guards, as being officially his Majesty's servants, and of the coachmen such as are within the privilege of the post-office, wear the royal liveries of course; and as it is summer (for all the *land* victories were naturally won in summer), they wear, on this fine evening, these liveries exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. Such a costume, and the elaborate arrangement of the laurels in their hats, dilate their hearts, by giving to them openly a personal connection with the great news in which already they have the general interest of patriotism. That great national sentiment surmounts and quells all sense of ordinary distinctions. Those passengers who happen to be gentlemen are now hardly to be distinguished as such except by dress; for the usual reserve of their manner in speaking to the attendants has on this night melted away.

¹ "At that time:"—I speak of the era previous to Waterloo.

One heart, one pride, one glory, connects every man by the transcendent bond of his national blood. The spectators, who are numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy with these fervent feelings by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by the post-office servants, and summoned to draw up, the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years—Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen—expressing the grandeur of the empire by the antiquity of its towns, and the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mail-bags. That sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off, which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play. Horses! can these be horses that bound off with the action and gestures of leopards? What stir!—what sea-like ferment!—what a thundering of wheels!—what a trampling of hoofs!—what a sounding of trumpets!—what farewell cheers—what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail—“Liverpool for ever!”—with the name of the particular victory—“Badajoz for ever!” or “Salamanca for ever!” The half-slumbering consciousness that, all night long, and all the next day—perhaps for even a longer period—many of these mails, like fire racing along a train of gunpowder, will be kindling at every instant new successions of burning joy, has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself, by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its progressive diffusion. A fiery arrow seems to be let loose, which from that moment is destined to travel, without intermission, westwards for three hundred miles—northwards for six hundred; and the sympathy of our Lombard Street friends at parting is exalted a hundredfold by a sort of visionary sympathy with the yet slumbering sympathies which in so vast a succession we are going to awake.

Liberated from the embarrassments of the city, and issuing into the broad uncrowded avenues of the northern suburbs, we soon begin to enter upon our natural pace of ten miles an hour. In the broad light of the summer evening, the sun, perhaps, only just at the point of setting, we are seen from every storey of every house. Heads of every age crowd to the windows—young and old understand the language of our victorious symbols—and rolling volleys of sympathising cheers run along us, behind us, and before us. The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness—real or assumed—thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect, with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him, and says, Be thou whole! Women and children, from garrets alike and cellars, through infinite London, look down or look up with loving eyes upon our gay ribbons and our martial laurels; sometimes kiss their hands; sometimes hang out, as signals of affection, pocket-handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters, anything that, by catching the summer breezes, will express an aerial jubilation. On the London side of Barnet, to which we draw near within a few minutes after nine, observe that private carriage which is approaching us. The weather being so warm, the glasses are all down; and one may read, as on the stage of a theatre, everything that goes on within. It contains three ladies—one likely to be “mamma,” and two of seventeen or eighteen, who are probably her daughters. What lovely animation, what beautiful unpremeditated pantomime, explaining to us every syllable that passes, in these ingenuous girls! By the sudden start and raising of the hands, on first discovering our laurelled equipage!—by the sudden movement and appeal to the elder lady from both of them—and by the heightened colour on their animated countenances, we can almost hear them saying, “See, see! Look at their laurels! Oh, mamma! there has been a great battle in Spain; and it has been a great victory.” In a moment we are on the point of passing them. We passengers—I on the box, and the two on the roof behind me—raise our hats to the ladies; the coachman makes

his professional salute with the whip; the guard even, though punctilious on the matter of his dignity as an officer under the crown, touches his hat. The ladies move to us, in return, with a winning graciousness of gesture; all smile on each side in a way that nobody could misunderstand, and that nothing short of a grand national sympathy could so instantaneously prompt. Will these ladies say that we are nothing to *them*? Oh, no; they will not say *that*. They cannot deny—they do not deny—that for this night they are our sisters; gentle or simple, scholar or illiterate servant, for twelve hours to come, we on the outside have the honour to be their brothers. Those poor women, again, who stop to gaze upon us with delight at the entrance of Barnet, and seem, by their air of weariness, to be returning from labour—do you mean to say that they are washerwomen and charwomen? Oh, my poor friend, you are quite mistaken. I assure you they stand in a far higher rank; for this one night they feel themselves by birth-right to be daughters of England, and answer to no humbler title.

Every joy, however, even rapturous joy—such is the sad law of earth—may carry with it grief, or fear of grief, to some. Three miles beyond Barnet, we see approaching us another private carriage, nearly repeating the circumstances of the former case. Here, also, the glasses are all down—here, also, is an elderly lady seated; but the two daughters are missing; for the single young person sitting by the lady's side, seems to be an attendant—so I judge from her dress, and her air of respectful reserve. The lady is in mourning; and her countenance expresses sorrow. At first she does not look up; so that I believe she is not aware of our approach, until she hears the measured beating of our horses' hoofs. Then she raises her eyes to settle them painfully on our triumphal equipage. Our decorations explain the case to her at once; but she beholds them with apparent anxiety, or even with terror. Some time before this, I, finding it difficult to hit a flying mark, when embarrassed by the coachman's person and reins

intervening, had given to the guard a *Courier* evening paper containing the gazette, for the next carriage that might pass. Accordingly he tossed it in, so folded that the huge capitals, expressing some such legend as GLORIOUS VICTORY, might catch the eye at once. To see the paper, however, at all, interpreted as it was by our ensigns of triumph, explained everything; and, if the guard were right in thinking the lady to have received it with a gesture of horror, it could not be doubtful that she had suffered some deep personal affliction in connection with this Spanish war.

Here, now, was the case of one who, having formerly suffered, might, erroneously perhaps, be distressing herself with anticipations of another similar suffering. That same night, and hardly three hours later, occurred the reverse case. A poor woman, who too probably would find herself, in a day or two, to have suffered the heaviest of afflictions by the battle, blindly allowed herself to express an exultation so unmeasured in the news and its details as gave to her the appearance which amongst Celtic Highlanders is called *fey*. This was at some little town where we changed horses an hour or two after midnight. Some fair or wake had kept the people up out of their beds, and had occasioned a partial illumination of the stalls and booths, presenting an unusual but very impressive effect. We saw many lights moving about as we drew near; and perhaps the most striking scene on the whole route was our reception at this place. The flashing of torches and the beautiful radiance of blue lights (technically, Bengal lights) upon the heads of our horses; the fine effect of such a showery and ghostly illumination falling upon our flowers and glittering laurels;¹ whilst all around ourselves, that formed a centre of light, the darkness gathered on the rear and flanks in massy blackness; these optical splendours, together with the prodigious enthusiasm of the people, composed a picture at once scenical and affecting, theatrical and holy.

¹ “*Glittering laurels:*”—I must observe, that the colour of *green* suffers almost a spiritual change and exaltation under the effect of Bengal lights.

As we staid for three or four minutes, I alighted; and immediately from a dismantled stall in the street, where no doubt she had been presiding through the earlier part of the night, advanced eagerly a middle-aged woman. The sight of my newspaper it was that had drawn her attention upon myself. The victory which we were carrying down to the provinces on *this* occasion, was the imperfect one of Talavera—imperfect for its results, such was the virtual treachery of the Spanish general, Cuesta, but not imperfect in its ever-memorable heroism. I told her the main outline of the battle. The agitation of her enthusiasm had been so conspicuous when listening, and when first applying for information, that I could not but ask her if she had not some relative in the Peninsular army. Oh, yes; her only son was there. In what regiment? He was a trooper in the 23d Dragoons. My heart sank within me as she made that answer. This sublime regiment, which an Englishman should never mention without raising his hat to their memory, had made the most memorable and effective charge recorded in military annals. They leaped their horses—*over* a trench where they could, *into* it, and with the result of death or mutilation, when they could *not*. What proportion cleared the trench is nowhere stated. Those who *did*, closed up and went down upon the enemy with such divinity of fervour (I use the word *divinity* by design: the inspiration of God must have prompted this movement to those whom even then He was calling to His presence), that two results followed. As regarded the enemy, this 23d Dragoons, not, I believe, originally three hundred and fifty strong, paralysed a French column, six thousand strong, then ascended the hill, and fixed the gaze of the whole French army. As regarded themselves, the 23d were supposed at first to have been barely not annihilated; but eventually, I believe, about one in four survived.

And this, then, was the regiment—a regiment already for some hours glorified and hallowed to the ear of all London, as lying stretched, by a large majority, upon one bloody aceldama—in which the young trooper served

whose mother was now talking in a spirit of such joyous enthusiasm. Did I tell her the truth? Had I the heart to break up her dreams? No. To-morrow, said I to myself—to-morrow, or the next day, will publish the worst. For one night more, wherefore should she not sleep in peace? After to-morrow, the chances are too many that peace will forsake her pillow. This brief respite, then, let her owe to *my* gift and *my* forbearance. But, if I told her not of the bloody price that had been paid, not, therefore, was I silent on the contributions from her son's regiment to that day's service and glory. I showed her not the funeral banners under which the noble regiment were sleeping. I lifted not the overshadowing laurels from the bloody trench in which horse and rider lay mangled together. But I told her how these dear children of England, officers and privates, had leaped their horses over all obstacles as gaily as hunters to the morning's chase. I told her how they rode their horses into the mists of death (saying to myself, but not saying to *her*), and laid down their young lives for thee, O mother England! as willingly—poured out their noble blood as cheerfully—as ever, after a long day's sport, when infants, they had rested their wearied heads upon their mother's knees, or had sunk to sleep in her arms.

Strange it is, yet true, that she seemed to have no fears for her son's safety, even after this knowledge that the 23d Dragoons had been memorably engaged; but so much was she enraptured by the knowledge that *his* regiment, and therefore that *he*, had rendered conspicuous service in the dreadful conflict—a service which had actually made them, within the last twelve hours, the foremost topic of conversation in London—so absolutely was fear swallowed up in joy—that, in the mere simplicity of her fervent nature, the poor woman threw her arms round my neck, as she thought of her son, and gave to *me* the kiss which secretly was meant for *him*.

DREAM-FUGUE

FOUNDED ON THE PRECEDING THEME OF SUDDEN DEATH

Whence the sound
 Of instruments, that made melodious chime,
 Was heard, of harp and organ; and who moved
 Their stops and chords, was seen; his volant touch
 Instinct through all proportions, low and high,
 Fled and pursued transverse the resonant fugue.

Par. Lost, Bk. XI.

[After his animated and picturesque account of coaching-travel and episodes, De Quincey passes to his "Vision of Sudden Death," in which he sets forth at great length the episode of the imminent collision on the high-road between the coach and the trap, and the tragedy which, for the space of seventy seconds, he thought was about to occur. This leads him to his "Dream-Fugue," which is worth reading, though it is by no means one of the author's most successful efforts—it is altogether too mannered and extravagant, and the effort to write something fine, to be poetical and "impassioned," is far too obvious.]

Tumultuosissimamente

PASSION of sudden death! that once in youth I read and interpreted by the shadows of thy averted signs!—rapture of panic taking the shape (which amongst tombs in churches I have seen) of woman bursting her sepulchral bonds—of woman's Ionic form bending forward from the ruins of her grave with arching foot, with eyes upraised, with clasped adoring hands—waiting, watching, trembling, praying for the trumpet's call to rise from dust for ever! Ah, vision too fearful of shuddering humanity on the brink of almighty abysses!—vision that didst start back, that didst reel away, like a shrivelling scroll from before the wrath of fire racing on the wings of the wind! Epilepsy so brief of horror, wherefore is it that thou canst not die? Passing so suddenly into darkness, wherefore is it that still thou sheddest thy sad funeral blights upon the gorgeous mosaics of dreams? Fragment of music too passionate, heard once, and heard no more, what aileth thee, that thy deep rolling chords

come up at intervals through all the worlds of sleep, and after forty years, have lost no element of horror?

I

Lo, it is summer—almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savannah, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating—she upon a fairy pinnacle, and I upon an English three-decker. Both of us are wooing gales of festal happiness within the domain of our common country, within that ancient watery park, within that pathless chase of ocean, where England takes her pleasure as a huntress through winter and summer, from the rising to the setting sun. Ah, what a wilderness of floral beauty was hidden, or was suddenly revealed, upon the tropic islands through which the pinnacle moved! And upon her deck what a bevy of human flowers—young women how lovely, young men how noble, that were dancing together, and slowly drifting towards *us* amidst music and incense, amidst blossoms from forests and gorgeous corymbi from vintages, amidst natural carolling, and the echoes of sweet girlish laughter. Slowly the pinnacle nears us, gaily she hails us, and silently she disappears beneath the shadow of our mighty bows. But then, as at some signal from heaven, the music, and the carols, and the sweet echoing of girlish laughter—all are hushed. What evil has smitten the pinnacle, meeting or overtaking her? Did ruin to our friends couch within our own dreadful shadow? was our shadow the shadow of death? I looked over the bow for an answer, and, behold! the pinnacle was dismantled; the revel and the revellers were found no more; the glory of the vintage was dust; and the forests with their beauty were left without a witness upon the seas. “But where,” and I turned to our crew—“where are the lovely women that danced beneath the awning of flowers and clustering corymbi? Whither have fled the noble young men that danced with *them*?” Answer there was none. But sud-

denly the man at the mast-head, whose countenance darkened with alarm, cried out, "Sail on the weather beam! Down she comes upon us: in seventy seconds she also will founder."

II

I looked to the weather side, and the summer had departed. The sea was rocking, and shaken with gathering wrath. Upon its surface sat mighty mists, which grouped themselves into arches and long cathedral aisles. Down one of these, with the fiery pace of a quarrel from a cross-bow, ran a frigate right athwart our course. "Are they mad?" some voice exclaimed from our deck. "Do they woo their ruin?" But in a moment, as she was close upon us, some impulse of a heady current or local vortex gave a wheeling bias to her course, and off she forged without a shock. As she ran past us, high aloft amongst the shrouds stood the lady of the pinnacle. The deeps opened ahead in malice to receive her, towering surges of foam ran after her, the billows were fierce to catch her. But far away she was borne into desert spaces of the sea: whilst still by sight I followed her, as she ran before the howling gale, chased by angry sea-birds and by maddening billows; still I saw her, as at the moment when she ran past us, standing amongst the shrouds, with her white draperies streaming before the wind. There she stood, with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling—rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying—there for leagues I saw her as she stood, raising at intervals one hand to heaven, amidst the fiery crests of the pursuing waves and the raving of the storm; until at last, upon a sound from afar of malicious laughter and mockery, all was hidden for ever in driving showers; and afterwards, but when I know not, nor how,

III

Sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance, wailing over the dead that die before the dawn, awakened

me as I slept in a boat moored to some familiar shore. The morning twilight even then was breaking; and, by the dusky revelations which it spread, I saw a girl, adorned with a garland of white roses about her head for some great festival, running along the solitary strand in extremity of haste. Her running was the running of panic; and often she looked back as to some dreadful enemy in the rear. But when I leaped ashore, and followed on her steps to warn her of a peril in front, alas! from me she fled as from another peril, and vainly I shouted to her of quicksands that lay ahead. Faster and faster she ran; round a promontory of rocks she wheeled out of sight; in an instant I also wheeled round it, but only to see the treacherous sands gathering above her head. Already her person was buried; only the fair young head and the diadem of white roses around it were still visible to the pitying heavens; and, last of all, was visible one white marble arm. I saw by the early twilight this fair young head, as it was sinking down to darkness—saw this marble arm, as it rose above her head and her treacherous grave, tossing, faltering, rising, clutching, as at some false deceiving hand stretched out from the clouds—saw this marble arm uttering her dying hope, and then uttering her dying despair. The head, the diadem, the arm—these all had sunk; at last over these also the cruel quicksand had closed; and no memorial of the fair young girl remained on earth, except my own solitary tears, and the funeral bells from the desert seas, that, rising again more softly, sang a requiem over the grave of the buried child, and over her blighted dawn.

I sat, and wept in secret the tears that men have ever given to the memory of those that died before the dawn, and by the treachery of earth, our mother. But suddenly the tears and funeral bells were hushed by a shout as of many nations, and by a roar as from some great king's artillery, advancing rapidly along the valleys, and heard afar by echoes from the mountains. "Hush!" I said, as I bent my ear earthwards to listen—"hush!"—this either is the very anarchy of strife, or else"—and

then I listened more profoundly, and whispered as I raised my head—"or else, oh heavens! it is *victory* that is final, victory that swallows up all strife."

IV

Immediately, in trance, I was carried over land and sea to some distant kingdom, and placed upon a triumphal car, amongst companions crowned with laurel. The darkness of gathering midnight, brooding over all the land, hid from us the mighty crowds that were weaving restlessly about ourselves as a centre: we heard them, but saw them not. Tidings had arrived, within an hour, of a grandeur that measured itself against centuries; too full of pathos they were, too full of joy, to utter themselves by other language than by tears, by restless anthems, and *Te Deums* reverberated from the choirs and orchestras of earth. These tidings we that sat upon the laurelled car had it for our privilege to publish amongst all nations. And already, by signs audible through the darkness, by snortings and tramlings, our angry horses, that knew no fear of fleshly weariness, upbraided us with delay. Wherefore *was* it that we delayed? We waited for a secret word, that should bear witness to the hope of nations, as now accomplished for ever. At midnight the secret word arrived; which word was—Waterloo and Recovered Christendom! The dreadful word shone by its own light; before us it went; high above our leaders' heads it rode, and spread a golden light over the paths which we traversed. Every city, at the presence of the secret word, threw open its gates. The rivers were conscious as we crossed. All the forests, as we ran along their margins, shivered in homage to the secret word. And the darkness comprehended it.

Two hours after midnight we approached a mighty Minster. Its gates, which rose to the clouds, were closed. But when the dreadful word, that rode before us, reached them with its golden light, silently they moved back upon their hinges; and at a flying gallop

our equipage entered the grand aisle of the cathedral. Headlong was our pace; and at every altar, in the little chapels and oratories to the right hand and left of our course, the lamps, dying or sickening, kindled anew in sympathy with the secret word that was flying past. Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral, and as yet no strength of morning light had reached us, when before us we saw the aerial galleries of organ and choir. Every pinnacle of the fretwork, every station of advantage amongst the traceries, was crested by white-robed choristers, that sang deliverance; that wept no more tears, as once their fathers had wept; but at intervals that sang together to the generations, saying,

Chant the deliverer's praise in every tongue,

and receiving answers from afar,

Such as once in heaven and earth were sung.

And of their chanting was no end; of our headlong pace was neither pause nor slackening.

Thus, as we ran like torrents—thus, as we swept with bridal rapture over the Campo Santo¹ of the cathedral graves—suddenly we became aware of a vast necropolis rising upon the far-off horizon—a city of sepulchres, built within the saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth. Of purple granite was the necropolis; yet, in the first minute, it lay like a purple stain upon the horizon, so mighty was the distance.

¹ "*Campo Santo*:"—It is probable that most of my readers will be acquainted with the history of the Campo Santo (or cemetery) at Pisa, composed of earth brought from Jerusalem from a bed of sanctity, as the highest prize which the noble piety of crusaders could ask or imagine. To readers who are unacquainted with England, or who (being English) are yet unacquainted with the cathedral cities of England, it may be right to mention that the graves within-side the cathedrals often form a flat pavement over which carriages and horses *might* run; and perhaps a boyish remembrance of one particular cathedral, across which I had seen passengers walk and burdens carried, as about two centuries back they were through the middle of St. Paul's in London, may have assisted my dream.

In the second minute it trembled through many changes, growing into terraces and towers of wondrous altitude, so mighty was the pace. In the third minute already, with our dreadful gallop, we were entering its suburbs. Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, that ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses. Every sarcophagus showed many bas-reliefs—bas-reliefs of battles and of battle-fields; battles from forgotten ages—battles from yesterday—battle-fields that, long since, nature had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers—battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson with carnage. Where the terraces ran, there did *we* run; where the towers curved, there did *we* curve. With the flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood, wheeling round headlands—like hurricanes that ride into the secrets of forests—faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried earthly passions, kindled warrior instincts, amongst the dust that lay around us—dust oftentimes of our noble fathers that had slept in God from Créci to Trafalgar.

And now had we reached the last sarcophagus, now were we abreast of the last bas-relief, already had we recovered the arrow-like flight of the illimitable central aisle, when coming up this aisle to meet us we beheld afar off a female child, that rode in a carriage as frail as flowers. The mists, which went before her, hid the fawns that drew her, but could not hide the shells and tropic flowers with which she played—but could not hide the lovely smiles by which she uttered her trust in the mighty cathedral, and in the cherubim that looked down upon her from the mighty shafts of its pillars. Face to face she was meeting us; face to face she rode, as if danger there were none. “Oh, baby!” I exclaimed, “shalt thou be the ransom for Waterloo? Must we, that carry tidings of great joy to every people, be messengers of ruin to thee!” In horror I rose at the thought; but then

also, in horror at the thought, rose one that was sculptured on a bas-relief—a Dying Trumpeter. Solemnly from the field of battle he rose to his feet; and, unslinging his stony trumpet, carried it, in his dying anguish, to his stony lips—sounding once, and yet once again; proclamation that, in *thy* ears, oh baby! spoke from the battlements of death. Immediately deep shadows fell between us, and aboriginal silence. The choir had ceased to sing. The hoofs of our horses, the dreadful rattle of our harness, the groaning of our wheels, alarmed the graves no more. By horror the bas-relief had been unlocked into life. By horror we, that were so full of life, we men and our horses, with their fiery fore-legs rising in mid air to their everlasting gallop, were frozen to a bas-relief. Then a third time the trumpet sounded; the seals were taken off all pulses; life, and the frenzy of life, tore into their channels again; again the choir burst forth in sunny grandeur, as from the muffling of storms and darkness; again the thunderings of our horses carried temptation into the graves. One cry burst from our lips, as the clouds, drawing off from the aisle, showed it empty before us—“Whither has the infant fled?—is the young child caught up to God?” Lo! afar off, in a vast recess, rose three mighty windows to the clouds; and on a level with their summits, at height insuperable to man, rose an altar of purest alabaster. On its eastern face was trembling a crimson glory. A glory was it from the reddening dawn that now streamed *through* the windows? Was it from the crimson robes of the martyrs painted *on* the windows? Was it from the bloody bas-reliefs of earth? There, suddenly, within that crimson radiance, rose the apparition of a woman’s head, and then of a woman’s figure. The child it was—grown up to woman’s height. Clinging to the horns of the altar, voiceless she stood—sinking, rising, raving, despairing; and behind the volume of incense, that, night and day, streamed upwards from the altar, dimly was seen the fiery font, and the shadow of that dreadful being who should have baptized her with the baptism of death. But by her side was kneeling her better angel, that hid

his face with wings; that wept and pleaded for *her*; that prayed when *she* could *not*; that fought with Heaven by tears for *her* deliverance; which also, as he raised his immortal countenance from his wings, I saw, by the glory in his eye, that from Heaven he had won at last.

V

Then was completed the passion of the mighty fugue. The golden tubes of the organ, which as yet had but muttered at intervals—gleaming amongst clouds and surges of incense—threw up, as from fountains unfathomable, columns of heart-shattering music. Choir and anti-choir were filling fast with unknown voices. Thou also, Dying Trumpeter!—with thy love that was victorious, and thy anguish that was finishing—didst enter the tumult; trumpet and echo—farewell love, and farewell anguish—rang through the dreadful *sanctus*. Oh, darkness of the grave! that from the crimson altar and from the fiery font wert visited and searched by the effulgence in the angel's eye—were these indeed thy children? Poms of life, that, from the burials of centuries, rose again to the voice of perfect joy, did ye indeed mingle with the festivals of Death? Lo! as I looked back for seventy leagues through the mighty cathedral, I saw the quick and the dead that sang together to God, together that sang to the generations of man. All the hosts of jubilation, like armies that ride in pursuit, moved with one step. Us, that, with laurelled heads, were passing from the cathedral, they overtook, and, as with a garment, they wrapped us round with thunders greater than our own. As brothers we moved together; to the dawn that advanced—to the stars that fled; rendering thanks to God in the highest—that, having hid His face through one generation behind thick clouds of War, once again was ascending—from the Campo Santo of Waterloo was ascending—in the visions of Peace; rendering thanks for thee, young girl! whom, having overshadowed with His ineffable passion of death, suddenly did God relent; suffered thy angel to turn aside

His arm; and even in thee, sister unknown! shown to me for a moment only to be hidden for ever, found an occasion to glorify His goodness. A thousand times, amongst the phantoms of sleep, have I seen thee entering the gates of the golden dawn—with the secret word riding before thee—with the armies of the grave behind thee; seen thee sinking, rising, raving, despairing; a thousand times in the worlds of sleep have seen thee followed by God's angel through storms; through desert seas; through the darkness of quicksands; through dreams, and the dreadful revelations that are in dreams—only that at the last, with one sling of His victorious arm, He might snatch thee back from ruin, and might emblazon in thy deliverance the endless resurrections of His love!

THE NEBULA IN ORION

[To the dream category also belongs the 'weird account De Quincey gives of what certainly no other eye but his own ever beheld—the nebula in Orion seen, not through a powerful telescope, as the author professes, but through the transforming medium of his own imagination. This wonderful burst of fantastic eloquence occurs in a review, contributed to Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1846, of a book by Dr. J. P. Nichol, Professor of Astronomy in the University of Glasgow. It does not detract from the force of De Quincey's picture to observe that one may look for hours at Orion and his nebula without perceiving anything at all resembling that monstrous image of Titanic horror and power which is here suggested.]

IF on some moonless night, in some fitting condition of the atmosphere, Lord Rosse would permit the reader and myself to walk into the front drawing-room of his telescope, then I might say to my companion, Come, and I will show you what is sublime! In fact, what I am going to lay before him from Dr. Nichol's work is, or at least *would* be (when translated into Hebrew grandeur by the mighty telescope), a step above even that object which some four-and-thirty years ago in the British Museum

struck me as simply the sublimest sight which in this sight-seeing world I had seen. It was the Memnon's head, then recently brought from Egypt. I looked at it, as the reader must suppose, in order to understand the depth which I have here ascribed to the impression, not as a human, but as a symbolic head; and what it symbolised to me were:—1. The peace which passeth all understanding. 2. The eternity which baffles and confounds all faculty of computation; the eternity which *had* been, the eternity which *was* to be. 3. The diffusive love, not such as rises and falls upon waves of life and mortality, not such as sinks and swells by undulations of time, but a procession, an emanation, from some mystery of endless dawn. You durst not call it a smile that radiated from the lips; the radiation was too awful to clothe itself in adumbrations or memorials of flesh.

In *that* mode of sublimity, perhaps, I still adhere to my first opinion, that nothing so great was ever beheld. The atmosphere for *this*, for the Memnon, was the breathlessness which belongs to a saintly trance; the holy thing seemed to live by silence. But there *is* a picture, the pendant of the Memnon, there *is* a dreadful cartoon, from the gallery which has begun to open upon Lord Rosse's telescope, where the appropriate atmosphere for investing it must be drawn from another silence, from the frost and from the eternities of death. It is the famous *nebula* in the constellation of Orion; famous for the unexampled defiance with which it resisted all approaches from the most potent of former telescopes; famous for its frightful magnitude, and for the frightful depth to which it is sunk in the abysses of the heavenly wilderness; famous just now for the submission with which it has begun to render up its secrets to the all-conquering telescope; and famous in all time coming for the horror of the regal phantasma which it has perfected to eyes of flesh. Had Milton's "incestuous mother," with her fleshless son, and with the warrior angel, his father, that led the rebellions of heaven, been suddenly unmasked by Lord Rosse's instrument, in these dreadful distances before which, simply as ex-

pressions of resistance, the mind of man shudders and recoils, there would have been nothing more appalling in the exposure; in fact, it would have been essentially the same exposure: the same expression of power in the detestable phantom, the same rebellion in the attitude, the same pomp of malice in the features towards a universe seasoned for its assault.

Description of the Nebula in Orion, as forced to show out by Lord Rosse.—You see a head thrown back, and raising it, face (or eyes, if eyes it had) in the very anguish of hatred, to some unknown heavens. What *should* be its skull wears what *might* be an Assyrian tiara, only ending behind in a floating train. This head rests upon a beautifully developed neck and throat. All power being given to the awful enemy, he is beautiful where he pleases, in order to point and envenom his ghostly ugliness. The mouth, in that stage of the apocalypse which Sir John Herschel was able to arrest in his eighteen-inch mirror, is amply developed. Brutalities unspeakable sit upon the upper lip, which is confluent with a snout; for separate nostrils there are none. Were it not for this one defect of nostrils; and, even in spite of this defect (since, in so mysterious a mixture of the angelic and the brutal, we may suppose the sense of odour to work by some compensatory organ), one is reminded by the phantom's attitude of a passage ever memorable, in Milton: that passage, I mean, where Death first becomes aware, soon after the original trespass, of his own future empire over man. The "meagre shadow" even smiles (for the first time and the last) on apprehending his own abominable bliss, by apprehending from afar the savour "of mortal change on earth":

"Such a scent" (he says) "I draw
Of carnage, prey innumerable."

As illustrating the attitude of the phantom in Orion, let the reader allow me to quote the tremendous passage—

So saying, with delight he snuff'd the smell
Of mortal change on earth. As when a flock

Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote,
 Against the day of battle, to a field,
 Where armies lie encamp'd, come flying, lured
 With scent of living carcasses design'd
 For death, the following day, in bloody fight;
 So scented the grim feature, and upturn'd
 His nostril wide into the murky air,
 Sagacious of his quarry from so far.¹

But the lower lip, which is drawn inwards with the curve of a marine shell—oh, what a convolute of cruelty and revenge is *there!* Cruelty!—to whom? Revenge!—for what? Pause not to ask; but look upwards to other mysteries. In the very region of his temples, driving itself downwards into his cruel brain, and breaking the continuity of his diadem, is a horrid chasm, a ravine, a shaft, that many centuries would not traverse; and it is serrated on its posterior wall with a harrow that is partly hidden. From the anterior wall of this chasm rise, in vertical directions, two processes; one perpendicular, and rigid as a horn, the other streaming forward before some portentous breath. What these could be, seemed doubtful; but now, when further examinations by Sir John Herschel, at the Cape of Good Hope, have filled up the scattered outline with a rich umbrageous growth, one is inclined to regard them as the plumes of a sultan. Dressed he is, therefore, as well as armed. And finally comes Lord Rosse, that glorifies him with the jewellery²

¹ I have never met with any notice of Milton's obligation to Lucan in this tremendous passage; perhaps the most sublime, all things considered, that exists in human literature. The words in Lucan close thus:—

“Et nare sagaci
 Aëra non sanum, tactumque cadavere sensit.”

² “*The jewellery of stars:*”—And one thing is very remarkable, viz., that not only the stars justify this name of jewellery, as usual, by the life of their splendour, but also, in this case, by their arrangement. No jeweller could have set, or disposed with more art, the magnificent quadrille of stars which is placed immediately below the upright plume. There is also another, a truncated quadrille, wanting only the left hand star (or you might call it a bisected lozenge) placed on the diadem, but obliquely placed as regards

of stars: he is now a vision "to dream of, not to tell:" he is ready for the worship of those that are tormented in sleep: and the stages of his solemn uncovering by astronomy, first by Sir W. Herschel, secondly by his son, and finally by Lord Rosse, is like the reversing of some heavenly doom, like the raising one after another of the seals that had been sealed by the angel in the Revelation.

the curve of that diadem. Two or three other arrangements are striking, though not equally so, both from their regularity and from their repeating each other, as the forms in a kaleidoscope.

EPISODES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

[Almost everything that De Quincey wrote was more or less autobiographical; his own personality, his own experiences, especially those of youth and early manhood, coloured all his imaginative, and most of his critical, speculative, and philosophical work. Various fragmentary papers of an avowedly autobiographic character were contributed by him to *Tait's* and other magazines. These papers give an account in minute detail of the first three-and-twenty years of De Quincey, up to the time that he left Oxford. His family, his childish recollections, his boyish troubles and adventures, his precocious intellectual development, are recalled by his prodigious memory and described with his extraordinary faculty for throwing an atmosphere of romantic interest over the most trivial and commonplace matters. The Autobiography is De Quincey's real Confession, and a much more genuine and veracious, and in some respects a more attractive, document than the great opium fantasy. It is written with less power and less imaginative effort; but it contains many characteristic examples of De Quincey's humour and pathos, and his command of beautiful and appropriate language.]

THE AFFLICTION OF CHILDHOOD

THE earliest incidents in my life, which left stings in my memory so as to be remembered at this day, were two, and both before I could have completed my second year; namely, 1st, a remarkable dream of terrific grandeur about a favourite nurse, which is interesting to myself for this reason—that it demonstrates my dreaming tendencies to have been constitutional, and not dependent upon laudanum; and, 2dly, the fact of having connected a profound sense of pathos with the reappearance, very early in the spring, of some crocuses. This I mention as inexplicable; for such annual resurrections of plants and flowers affect us only as memorials, or suggestions

of some higher change, and therefore in connection with the idea of death; yet of death I could, at that time, have had no experience whatever.

This, however, I was speedily to acquire. My two eldest sisters—eldest of three *then* living, and also elder than myself—were summoned to an early death. The first who died was Jane, about two years older than myself. She was three and a-half, I one and a-half, more or less by some trifle that I do not recollect. But death was then scarcely intelligible to me, and I could not so properly be said to suffer sorrow as a sad perplexity.

* * * * *

So passed away from earth one of those three sisters that made up my nursery playmates; and so did my acquaintance (if such it could be called) commence with mortality. Yet, in fact, I knew little more of mortality than that Jane had disappeared. She had gone away; but, perhaps, she would come back. Happy interval of heaven-born ignorance! Gracious immunity of infancy from sorrow disproportioned to its strength! I was sad for Jane's absence. But still in my heart I trusted that she would come again. Summer and winter came again—crocuses and roses; why not little Jane?

Thus easily was healed, then, the first wound in my infant heart. Not so the second. For thou, dear, noble Elizabeth, around whose ample brow, as often as thy sweet countenance rises upon the darkness, I fancy a *tiara* of light or a gleaming *aureola*¹ in token of thy premature intellectual grandeur—thou whose head, for its superb developments, was the astonishment of science²

¹ "*Aureola*:"—The *aureola* is the name given in the *Legends of the Christian Saints* to that golden diadem or circlet of supernatural light (that *glory*, as it is commonly called in English) which, amongst the great masters of painting in Italy, surrounded the heads of Christ and of distinguished saints.

² "*The astonishment of science*:"—Her medical attendants were Dr. Percival, a well-known literary physician, who had been a correspondent of Condorcet, D'Alembert, &c., and Mr. Charles White, the most distinguished surgeon at that time in the North of

—thou next, but after an interval of happy years, thou also wert summoned away from our nursery; and the night which for me gathered upon that event ran after my steps far into life; and perhaps at this day I resemble little for good or for ill that which else I should have been. Pillar of fire that didst go before me to guide and to quicken—pillar of darkness, when thy countenance was turned away to God, that didst too truly reveal to my dawning fears the secret shadow of death, by what mysterious gravitation was it that *my* heart had been drawn to thine? Could a child, six years old, place any special value upon intellectual forwardness? Serene and capacious as my sister's mind appeared to me upon after review, was *that* a charm for stealing away the heart of an infant? Oh no! I think of it *now* with interest, because it lends, in a stranger's ear, some justification to the excess of my fondness. But then it was lost upon me; or, if not lost, was perceived only through its effects. Hadst thou been an idiot, my sister, not the less I must have loved thee, having that capacious heart—overflowing, even as mine overflowed, with tenderness, strung, even as mine was strung, by the necessity of loving and being loved. This it was which crowned thee with beauty and power:—

England. It was he who pronounced her head to be the finest in its development of any that he had ever seen—an assertion which, to my own knowledge, he repeated in after years, and with enthusiasm. That he had some acquaintance with the subject may be presumed from this, that, at so early a stage of such inquiries, he had published a work on human craniology, supported by measurements of heads selected from all varieties of the human species. Meantime, as it would grieve me that any trait of what might seem vanity should creep into this record, I will admit that my sister died of hydrocephalus; and it has been often supposed, that the premature expansion of the intellect in cases of that class is altogether morbid—forced on, in fact, by the mere stimulation of the disease. I would, however, suggest, as a possibility, the very opposite order of relation between the disease and the intellectual manifestations. Not the disease may always have caused the preternatural growth of the intellect; but, inversely, this growth of the intellect coming on spontaneously, and outrunning the capacities of the physical structure, may have caused the disease.

Love, the holy sense,
Best gift of God, in thee was most intense.

That lamp of Paradise was, for myself, kindled by reflection from the living light which burned so steadfastly in thee; and never but to thee, never again since *thy* departure, had I power or temptation, courage or desire, to utter the feelings which possessed me. For I was the shyest of children; and, at all stages of life, a natural sense of personal dignity held me back from exposing the least ray of feelings which I was not encouraged *wholly* to reveal.

It is needless to pursue, circumstantially, the course of that sickness which carried off my leader and companion. She (according to my recollection at this moment) was just as near to nine years as I to six. And perhaps this natural precedency in authority of years and judgment, united to the tender humility with which she declined to assert it, had been amongst the fascinations of her presence. It was upon a Sunday evening, if such conjectures can be trusted, that the spark of fatal fire fell upon that train of predispositions to a brain complaint which had hitherto slumbered within her. She had been permitted to drink tea at the house of a labouring man, the father of a favourite female servant. The sun had set when she returned, in the company of this servant, through meadows reeking with exhalations after a fervent day. From that day she sickened. In such circumstances, a child, as young as myself, feels no anxieties. Looking upon medical men as people privileged, and naturally commissioned, to make war upon pain and sickness, I never had a misgiving about the result. I grieved, indeed, that my sister should lie in bed; I grieved still more to hear her moan. But all this appeared to me no more than as a night of trouble, on which the dawn would soon arise. O! moment of darkness and delirium, when the elder nurse awakened me from that delusion, and launched God's thunderbolt at my heart in the assurance that my sister **MUST** die. Rightly it is said of utter, utter misery, that it "cannot

be remembered.”¹ Itself, as a rememberable thing, is swallowed up in its own chaos. Blank anarchy and confusion of mind fell upon me. Deaf and blind I was, as I reeled under the revelation. I wish not to recall the circumstances of that time, when *my* agony was at its height, and hers, in another sense, was approaching. Enough it is to say, that all was soon over; and the morning of that day had at last arrived which looked down upon her innocent face, sleeping the sleep from which there is no awaking, and upon me sorrowing the sorrow for which there is no consolation.

On the day after my sister's death, whilst the sweet temple of her brain was yet unviolated by human scrutiny, I formed my own scheme for seeing her once more. Not for the world would I have made this known, nor have suffered a witness to accompany me. I had never heard of feelings that take the name of “sentimental,” nor dreamed of such a possibility. But grief, even in a child, hates the light, and shrinks from human eyes. The house was large enough to have two staircases; and by one of these I knew that about mid-day, when all would be quiet (for the servants dined at one o'clock), I could steal up into her chamber. I imagine that it was about an hour after high noon when I reached the chamber-door; it was locked, but the key was not taken away. Entering, I closed the door so softly, that, although it opened upon a hall which ascended through all the storeys, no echo ran along the silent walls. Then, turning round, I sought my sister's face. But the bed had been moved, and the back was now turned towards myself. Nothing met my eyes but one large window, wide open, through which the sun of midsummer at mid-day was showering down torrents of splendour. The weather was dry, the sky was cloudless, the blue depths seemed the express types of infinity; and it was not possible for eye to behold, or for heart to con-

¹ I stood in unimaginable trance

And agony which cannot be remember'd.

Speech of Alhadra, in Coleridge's Remorse.

ceive, any symbols more pathetic of life and the glory of life.

* * * * *

From the gorgeous sunlight I turned round to the corpse. There lay the sweet childish figure; there the angel face; and, as people usually fancy, it was said in the house that no features had suffered any change. Had they not? The forehead, indeed—the serene and noble forehead—*that* might be the same; but the frozen eyelids, the darkness that seemed to steal from beneath them, the marble lips, the stiffening hands, laid palm to palm, as if repeating the supplications of closing anguish—could these be mistaken for life? Had it been so, wherefore did I not spring to those heavenly lips with tears and never-ending kisses? But so it was *not*. I stood checked for a moment; awe, not fear, fell upon me; and, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow—the saddest that ear ever heard. It was a wind that might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries. Many times since, upon summer days, when the sun is about the hottest, I have remarked the same wind arising and uttering the same hollow, solemn, Memnonian, but saintly swell: it is in this world the one great audible symbol of eternity. And three times in my life have I happened to hear the same sound in the same circumstances—viz., when standing between an open window and a dead body on a summer day.

Instantly, when my ear caught this vast Æolian intonation, when my eye filled with the golden fulness of life, the pomps of the heavens above, or the glory of the flowers below, and turning when it settled upon the frost which overspread my sister's face, instantly a trance fell upon me. A vault seemed to open in the zenith of the far blue sky, a shaft which ran up for ever. I, in spirit, rose as if on billows that also rose up the shaft for ever; and the billows seemed to pursue the throne of God; but *that* also ran before us and fled away continually. The flight and the pursuit seemed to

go on for ever and ever. Frost gathering frost, some Sarsar wind of death, seemed to repel me; some mighty relation between God and death dimly struggled to evolve itself from the dreadful antagonism between them; shadowy meanings even yet continue to exercise and torment, in dreams, the deciphering oracle within me. I slept—for how long I cannot say; slowly I recovered my self-possession; and, when I woke, found myself standing, as before, close to my sister's bed.

* * * * * *

Grief! thou art classed amongst the depressing passions. And true it is that thou humblest to the dust, but also thou exaltest to the clouds. Thou shakest as with ague, but also thou steadiest like frost. Thou sickenest the heart, but also thou healest its infirmities. Among the very foremost of mine was morbid sensibility to shame. And, ten years afterwards, I used to throw my self-reproaches with regard to that infirmity into this shape—viz., that if I were summoned to seek aid for a perishing fellow-creature, and that I could obtain that aid only by facing a vast company of critical or sneering faces, I might, perhaps, shrink basely from the duty. It is true that no such case had ever actually occurred; so that it was a mere romance of casuistry to tax myself with cowardice so shocking. But to feel a doubt was to feel condemnation; and the crime that *might* have been, was in my eyes the crime that *had* been. Now, however, all was changed; and for anything which regarded my sister's memory, in one hour I received a new heart. Once in Westmoreland I saw a case resembling it. I saw a ewe suddenly put off and abjure her own nature, in a service of love—yes, slough it as completely as ever serpent sloughed his skin. Her lamb had fallen into a deep trench, from which all escape was hopeless without the aid of man. And to a man she advanced, bleating clamorously, until he followed her and rescued her beloved. Not less was the change in myself. Fifty thousand sneering faces would not have troubled me *now* in any office of tenderness to my sister's

memory. Ten legions would not have repelled me from seeking her, if there had been a chance that she could be found. Mockery! it was lost upon me. Laughter! I valued it not. And when I was taunted insultingly with "my girlish tears," that word "*girlish*" had no sting for me, except as a verbal echo to the one eternal thought of my heart—that a girl was the sweetest thing which I, in my short life, had known—that a girl it was who had crowned the earth with beauty, and had opened to my thirst fountains of pure celestial love, from which, in this world, I was to drink no more.

Now began to unfold themselves the consolations of solitude, those consolations which only I was destined to taste; now, therefore, began to open upon me those fascinations of solitude, which, when acting as a co-agency with unresisted grief, end in the paradoxical result of making out of grief itself a luxury; such a luxury as finally becomes a snare, overhanging life itself, and the energies of life, with growing menaces. All deep feelings of a *chronic* class agree in this, that they seek for solitude, and are fed by solitude. Deep grief, deep love, how naturally do these ally themselves with religious feeling! and all three—love, grief, religion—are haunters of solitary places. Love, grief, and the mystery of devotion—what were these without solitude? All day long, when it was not impossible for me to do so, I sought the most silent and sequestered nooks in the grounds about the house, or in the neighbouring fields. The awful stillness oftentimes of summer noons, when no winds were abroad, the appealing silence of grey or misty afternoons—these were fascinations as of witchcraft. Into the woods, into the desert air, I gazed, as if some comfort lay hid in *them*. I wearied the heavens with my inquest of beseeching looks. Obstinate I tormented the blue depths with my scrutiny, sweeping them for ever with my eyes, and searching them for one angelic face that might, perhaps, have permission to reveal itself for a moment.

At this time, and under this impulse of rapacious grief, that grasped at what it could not obtain, the

faculty of shaping images in the distance out of slight elements, and grouping them after the yearnings of the heart, grew upon me in morbid excess. And I recall at the present moment one instance of that sort, which may show how merely shadows, or a gleam of brightness, or nothing at all, could furnish a sufficient basis for this creative faculty.

On Sunday mornings I went with the rest of my family to church: it was a church on the ancient model of England, having aisles, galleries, organ, all things ancient and venerable, and the proportions majestic. Here, whilst the congregation knelt through the long litany, as often as we came to that passage, so beautiful amongst many that are so, where God is supplicated on behalf of "all sick persons and young children," and that he would "show his pity upon all prisoners and captives," I wept in secret; and raising my streaming eyes to the upper windows of the galleries, saw, on days when the sun was shining, a spectacle as affecting as ever prophet can have beheld. The *sides* of the windows were rich with storied glass; through the deep purples and crimsons streamed the golden light; emblazonries of heavenly illumination (from the sun) mingling with the earthly emblazonries (from art and its gorgeous colouring) of what is grandest in man. *There* were the apostles that had trampled upon earth, and the glories of earth, out of celestial love to man. *There* were the martyrs that had borne witness to the truth through flames, through torments, and through armies of fierce, insulting faces. *There* were the saints who, under intolerable pangs, had glorified God by meek submission to his will. And all the time, whilst this tumult of sublime memorials held on as the deep chords from some accompaniment in the bass, I saw through the wide central field of the window, where the glass was *uncoloured*, white, fleecy clouds sailing over the azure depths of the sky; were it but a fragment or a hint of such a cloud, immediately under the flash of my sorrow-haunted eye, it grew and shaped itself into visions of beds with white lawny curtains; and in the beds lay

sick children, dying children, that were tossing in anguish, and weeping clamorously for death. God, for some mysterious reason, could not suddenly release them from their pain; but he suffered the beds, as it seemed, to rise slowly through the clouds; slowly the beds ascended into the chambers of the air; slowly also his arms descended from the heavens, that he and his young children, whom in Palestine, once and for ever, he had blessed, though they *must* pass slowly through the dreadful chasm of separation, might yet meet the sooner. These visions were self-sustained. These visions needed not that any sound should speak to me, or music mould my feelings. The hint from the litany, the fragment from the clouds—those and the storied windows were sufficient. But not the less the blare of the tumultuous organ wrought its own separate creations. And oftentimes in anthems, when the mighty instrument threw its vast columns of sound, fierce yet melodious, over the voices of the choir—high in arches, when it seemed to rise, surmounting and overriding the strife of the vocal parts, and gathering by strong coercion the total storm into unity—sometimes I seemed to rise and walk triumphantly upon those clouds which, but a moment before, I had looked up to as mementos of prostrate sorrow; yes, sometimes under the transfigurations of music, felt of grief itself as of a fiery chariot for mounting victoriously above the causes of grief.

God speaks to children, also, in dreams, and by the oracles that lurk in darkness. But in solitude, above all things, when made vocal to the meditative heart by the truths and services of a national church, God holds with children “communion undisturbed.” Solitude, though it may be silent as light, is, like light, the mightiest of agencies; for solitude is essential to man. All men come into this world *alone*; all leave it *alone*. Even a little child has a dread, whispering consciousness, that, if he should be summoned to travel into God’s presence, no gentle nurse will be allowed to lead him by the hand, nor mother to carry him in her arms, nor little sister to share his trepidations. King and priest, warrior and

maiden, philosopher and child, all must walk those mighty galleries alone. The solitude, therefore, which in this world appals or fascinates a child's heart, is but the echo of a far deeper solitude, through which already he has passed, and of another solitude, deeper still, through which he *has* to pass: reflex of one solitude—prefiguration of another.

Oh, burden of solitude, that cleavest to man through every stage of his being! in his birth, which *has* been—in his life, which *is*—in his death, which *shall* be—mighty and essential solitude! that wast, and art, and art to be; thou broodest, like the Spirit of God moving upon the surface of the deeps, over every heart that sleeps in the nurseries of Christendom. Like the vast laboratory of the air, which, seeming to be nothing, or less than the shadow of a shade, hides within itself the principles of all things, solitude for the meditating child is the Agrippa's mirror of the unseen universe. Deep is the solitude of millions who, with hearts welling forth love, have none to love them. Deep is the solitude of those who, under secret griefs, have none to pity them. Deep is the solitude of those who, fighting with doubts or darkness, have none to counsel them. But deeper than the deepest of these solitudes is that which broods over childhood under the passion of sorrow—bringing before it, at intervals, the final solitude which watches for it, and is waiting for it within the gates of death. Oh, mighty and essential solitude, that wast, and art, and art to be! thy kingdom is made perfect in the grave; but even over those that keep watch outside the grave, like myself, an infant of six years old, thou stretchest out a sceptre of fascination.

THE PARIAH GIRLS

[This passage from De Quincey's *Autobiography* shows how early the idea of sorrow and suffering had entered into his mind. All through life, as Professor Masson remarks, he was haunted by this image of the pariah, the outcast, the being cut off from the normal joys, the common social intercourse, of his fellows. The thought that there were many men, and more women and children, so situated was constantly with him, and it contributed a note of special sadness to that undertone of melancholy which sounds through much of his writing. His sympathies, always vivid, assumed a phase of excessive intensity when he was brought into contact with the sufferings of women and young children, as every reader of the *Confessions* will remember.]

You have heard, reader, of pariahs. The pathos of that great idea possibly never reached you. Did it ever strike you how far that idea had extended? Do not fancy it peculiar to Hindostan. Before Delhi was, before Agra, or Lahore, might the pariah say, I was. The most interesting, if only as the most mysterious, race of ancient days, the Pelasgi, that overspread, in early times of Greece, the total Mediterranean—a race distinguished for beauty and for intellect, and sorrowful beyond all power of man to read the cause that could lie deep enough for so imperishable an impression—*they* were pariahs. The Jews that, in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, were cursed in a certain contingency with a sublimer curse than ever rang through the passionate wrath of prophecy, and that afterwards, in Jerusalem, cursed themselves, voluntarily taking on their own heads, and on the heads of their children's children for ever and ever, the guilt of innocent blood—*they* are pariahs to this hour. Yet for *them* there has ever shone a sullen light of hope. The gipsies, for whom no conscious or acknowledged hope burns through the mighty darkness that surrounds them—they are pariahs of pariahs. Lepers were a race of mediaeval pariahs, rejected of men, that now have gone to rest. But travel into the forests of the Pyrenees, and there you will find their modern representatives in the Cagots. Are these Pyre-

nean Cagots Pagans? Not at all. They are good Christians. Wherefore, then, that low door in the Pyrenean churches, through which the Cagots are forced to enter, and which, obliging them to stoop almost to the ground, is a perpetual memento of their degradation? Wherefore is it that men of pure Spanish blood will hold no intercourse with the Cagot? Wherefore is it that even the shadow of a Cagot, if it falls across a fountain, is held to have polluted that fountain? All this points to some dreadful taint of guilt, real or imputed, in ages far remote.¹

But in ages far nearer to ourselves, nay, in our own generation, and our own land, are many pariahs, sitting amongst us all, nay, oftentimes sitting (yet not recognised for what they really are) at good men's tables. How general is that sensuous dulness, that deafness of the heart, which the Scriptures attribute to human beings! "Having ears, they hear not; and, seeing, they do not understand." In the very act of facing or touching a dreadful object, they will utterly deny its existence. Men say to me daily, when I ask them, in passing "Anything in this morning's paper?" "Oh no, nothing at all." And, as I never had any other answer, I am bound to suppose that there never *was* anything in a daily newspaper; and, therefore, that the horrible burden of misery and of change which a century accumulates as

¹ The name and history of the Pyrenean Cagots are equally obscure. Some have supposed that, during the period of the Gothic warfare with the Moors, the Cagots were a Christian tribe that betrayed the Christian cause and interests at a critical moment. But all is conjecture. As to the name, Southey has somewhere offered a possible interpretation of it; but it struck me as far from felicitous, and not what might have been expected from Southey, whose vast historical research and commanding talent should naturally have unlocked this most mysterious of modern secrets, if any unlocking does yet lie within the resources of human skill and combining power, now that so many ages divide us from the original steps of the case. I may here mention, as a fact accidentally made known to myself, and apparently not known to Southey, that the Cagots, under a name very slightly altered, are found in France also, as well as Spain; and in provinces of France that have no connection at all with Spain.

its *facit* or total result, has not been distributed at all amongst its thirty-six thousand five hundred and twenty-five days: every day, it seems, was separately a blank day, yielding absolutely nothing—what children call a deaf nut, offering no kernel; and yet the total product has caused angels to weep and tremble. Meantime, when I come to look at the newspaper with my own eyes, I am astonished at the misreport of my informants. Were there no other section in it than simply that allotted to the police reports, oftentimes I stand aghast at the revelations there made of human life and the human heart—at its colossal guilt, and its colossal misery; at the suffering which oftentimes throws its shadow over palaces, and the grandeur of mute endurance which sometimes glorifies a cottage. Here transpires the dreadful truth of what is going on for ever under the thick curtains of domestic life, close behind us, and before us, and all around us. Newspapers are evanescent, and are too rapidly recurrent, and people see nothing great in what is familiar, nor can ever be trained to read the silent and the shadowy in what, for the moment, is covered with the babbling garrulity of daylight. I suppose now that, in the next generation after that which is here concerned, had any neighbour of our tutor been questioned on the subject of a domestic tragedy, which travelled through its natural stages in a leisurely way, and under the eyes of good Dr. S——, he would have replied, “Tragedy! oh, sir, nothing of the kind! You have been misled; the gentleman must lie under a mistake: perhaps it was in the next street.” No, it was *not* in the next street; and the gentleman does not lie under a mistake, or, in fact, lie at all. The simple truth is, blind old neighbour, that you, being rarely in the house, and, *when* there, only in one particular room, saw no more of what was hourly going on, than if you had been residing with the Sultan of Bokhara.

But I, a child between seven and eight years old, had access everywhere. I was privileged, and had the *entrée* even of the female apartments; one conse-

quence of which was, that I put *this* and *that* together. A number of syllables, that each for itself separately might have meant nothing at all, did yet, when put together, through weeks and months, read for *my* eyes into sentences as deadly and significant as *Tekel, up-harsin*. And another consequence was, that being, on account of my age, nobody at all, or very near it, I sometimes witnessed things that perhaps it had not been meant for anybody to witness, or perhaps some half-conscious negligence overlooked my presence. "Saw things! What was it now? Was it a man at midnight, with a dark lantern, and a six-barrel revolver?" No, *that* was not in the least like what I saw: it was a great deal more like what I will endeavour to describe. Imagine two young girls, of what exact age I really do not know, but apparently from twelve to fourteen, twins, remarkably plain in person and features, unhealthy, and obscurely reputed to be idiots. Whether they really were such was more than I knew, or could devise any plan for learning. Without dreaming of anything unkind or uncourteous, my original impulse had been to say, "If you please, are you idiots?" But I felt that such a question had an air of coarseness about it, though, for my own part, I had long reconciled myself to being called an idiot by my brother. There was, however, a further difficulty: breathed as a gentle, murmuring whisper, the question might possibly be reconciled to an indulgent ear as confidential and tender. Even to take a liberty with those you love, is to show your trust in their affection; but, alas! these poor girls were deaf; and to have shouted out, "Are you idiots, if you please?" in a voice that would have rung down three flights of stairs, promised (as I felt, without exactly seeing why) a dreadful exaggeration to whatever incivility might, at any rate, attach to the question; and some *did* attach, that was clear, even if warbled through an air of Cherubini's, and accompanied on the flute. Perhaps they were *not* idiots, and only seemed to be such from the slowness of apprehension naturally connected with deafness.

That I saw them but seldom, arose from their peculiar

position in the family. Their father had no private fortune ; his income from the church was very slender ; and, though considerably increased by the allowance made for us, his two pupils, still, in a great town, and with so large a family, it left him little room for luxuries. Consequently, he never had more than two servants, and at times only one. Upon this plea rose the scheme of the mother for employing these two young girls in menial offices of the household economy. One reason for that was, that she thus indulged her dislike for them, which she took no pains to conceal ; and thus, also, she withdrew them from the notice of strangers. In this way, it happened that I saw them myself but at uncertain intervals. Gradually, however, I came to be aware of their forlorn condition, to pity them, and to love them. The poor twins were undoubtedly plain, to the degree which is called, by unfeeling people, ugliness. They were also deaf, as I have said, and they were scrofulous ; one of them was disfigured by the small-pox ; they had glimmering eyes, red, like the eyes of ferrets, and scarcely half-open ; and they did not walk so much as stumble along. There, you have the worst of them. Now, hear something on the other side. What first won my pity was, their affection for each other, united to their constant sadness ; secondly, a notion which had crept into my head, probably derived from something said in my presence by elder people, that they were destined to an early death ; and, lastly, the incessant persecutions of their mother. This lady belonged, by birth, to a more elevated rank than that of her husband, and she was remarkably well-bred as regarded her manners. But she had probably a weak understanding : she was shrewish in her temper ; was a severe economist ; a merciless exactor of what she viewed as duty ; and, in persecuting her two unhappy daughters, though she yielded blindly to her unconscious dislike of them, as creatures that disgraced her, she was not aware, perhaps, of ever having put forth more expressions of anger and severity than were absolutely required to rouse the constitutional torpor of her daughters' nature ;

and where disgust has once rooted itself, and been habitually expressed in tones of harshness, the mere sight of the hateful object mechanically calls forth the eternal tones of anger, without distinct consciousness or separate intention in the speaker. Loud speaking, besides, or even shouting, was required by the deafness of the two girls. From anger so constantly discharging its thunders, naturally they did not show open signs of recoiling; but that they felt it deeply, may be presumed from their sensibility to kindness. My own experience showed *that*; for, as often as I met them, we exchanged kisses; and my wish had always been to beg them, if they really *were* idiots, not to mind it, since I should not like them the less on that account. This wish of mine never came to utterance; but not the less they were aware, by my manner of salutation, that one person at least, amongst those who might be considered strangers, did not find anything repulsive about them; and the pleasure they felt was expressed broadly upon their kindly faces.

Such was the outline of their position; and that being explained, what I saw was simply this; it composed a silent and symbolic scene, a momentary interlude in dumb show, which interpreted itself, and settled for ever in my recollection, as if it had prophesied and interpreted the event which soon followed. They were resting from toil, and both sitting down. This had lasted for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes. Suddenly from below-stairs the voice of angry summons rang up to their ears. Both rose in an instant, as if the echoing scourge of some avenging Tisiphone were uplifted above their heads; both opened their arms; flung them round each other's necks; and then, unclasping them, parted to their separate labours. This was my last memorable interview with the two sisters; in a week both were corpses. They had died, I believe, of scarlatina, and very nearly at the same moment.

LITERARY CRITICISM AND PORTRAITURE

THE LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LITERATURE OF POWER

[The distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power—between the writing that informs the understanding and that which moves the soul—is De Quincey's most notable, or at any rate his best known, contribution to the science of criticism. It is so well known, and has been repeated so often, that it now seems obvious—like so many of the greatest discoveries of the greatest minds. It is obvious of course that there is a considerable difference in kind between a London Directory and a love-lyric, between *King Lear* and a treatise on the construction of tramways; just as it has been obvious—since 15th March 1493—that any ship sailing continuously westward from Europe would either touch Eastern Asia or some intervening continent. But De Quincey brought into the domain of reality a conception which the minds of men had held only in vague indefiniteness. And perhaps even now many who repeat, at second-hand, De Quincey's aphorism do not quite clearly grasp its inner meaning, and fail to understand that the lyric or the epic may not belong to the literature of power, whereas the essay, the biography, or the scientific treatise quite conceivably may. It is all a question of the spirit which underlies the treatment. "Power" was that which De Quincey sought in all his uncharted wanderings through the fields of literature. Keenly as he appreciated verbal felicities and the subtler beauties of style, he valued literature not for its aesthetic appeal but because, in its highest forms, it quickens and expands man's "latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite." So he prized most the emotional expression of Life in poetry, in rhetoric, in "impassioned prose," in music, the avenues to that encompassing ocean of mystery which the reason and the understanding, clinging to fragmentary chains of causation, cannot touch.

The idea appears in diverse shapes in De Quincey's critical writings. Of the two passages given below the first is from the essay on "Alexander Pope" contributed to the *North British*

Review in 1848 and reprinted in vol. ix of the Collective Edition; the second is from the series of "Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected," first published twenty-five years earlier in the *London Magazine* during 1823 before the wave of curiosity thrown up by the *Confessions* had ebbed.]

I

WHAT is it that we mean by *literature*? Popularly, and amongst the thoughtless, it is held to include everything that is printed in a book. Little logic is required to disturb *that* definition; the most thoughtless person is easily made aware, that in the idea of *literature*, one essential element is,—some relation to a general and common interest of man, so that, what applies only to a local, or professional, or merely personal interest, even though presenting itself in the shape of a book, will not belong to literature. So far the definition is easily narrowed; and it is as easily expanded. For not only is much that takes a station in books not literature; but inversely, much that really *is* literature never reaches a station in books. The weekly sermons of Christendom, that vast pulpit literature which acts so extensively upon the popular mind—to warn, to uphold, to renew, to comfort, to alarm, does not attain the sanctuary of libraries in the ten-thousandth part of its extent. The drama again, as for instance, the finest of Shakespeare's plays in England, and all leading Athenian plays in the noon-tide of the Attic stage, operated as a literature on the public mind, and were (according to the strictest letter of that term) *published* through the audiences that witnessed¹ their representation some time before they were published as things to be read; and they were published in this scenical mode of publication with much more effect than they could have had as books, during ages of costly copying, or of costly printing.

¹ Charles I, for example, when Prince of Wales, and many others in his father's court, gained their known familiarity with Shakespeare—not through the original quartos, so slenderly diffused, nor through the first folio of 1623, but through the court representations of his chief dramas at Whitehall.

Books, therefore, do not suggest an idea co-extensive and interchangeable with the idea of literature; since much literature, scenic, forensic, or didactic (as from lecturers and public orators), may never come into books; and much that *does* come into books, may connect itself with no literary interest.¹ But a far more important correction, applicable to the common vague idea of literature, is to be sought—not so much in a better definition of literature, as in a sharper distinction of the two functions which it fulfils. In that great social organ, which, collectively, we call literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices that may blend and often *do* so, but capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*; and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is—to *teach*; the function of the second is—to *move*: the first is a rudder; the second, an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but, proximately, it does and must operate, else it ceases to be a literature of *power*, on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and genial emotions.

Men have so little reflected on the higher functions of literature, as to find it a paradox if one should describe it as a mean or subordinate purpose of books to give information. But this is a paradox only in the sense which makes it honourable to be paradoxical. Whenever we

¹ What are called *The Blue Books*, by which title are understood the folio Reports issued every session of Parliament by committees of the two Houses, and stitched into blue covers,—though often sneered at by the ignorant as so much waste paper, will be acknowledged gratefully by those who have used them diligently, as the main well-heads of all accurate information as to the Great Britain of this day. As an immense depository of faithful (*and not superannuated*) statistics, they are indispensable to the honest student. But no man would therefore class the *Blue Books* as literature.

talk in ordinary language of seeking information or gaining knowledge, we understand the words as connected with something of absolute novelty. But it is the grandeur of all truth, which *can* occupy a very high place in human interests, that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds: it exists eternally by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed, but never to be planted. To be capable of transplantation is the immediate criterion of a truth that ranges on a lower scale. Besides which, there is a rarer thing than truth, namely, *power*, or deep sympathy with truth. What is the effect, for instance, upon society, of children? By the pity, by the tenderness, and by the peculiar modes of admiration, which connect themselves with the helplessness, with the innocence, and with the simplicity of children, not only are the primal affections strengthened and continually renewed, but the qualities which are dearest in the sight of heaven—the frailty, for instance, which appeals to forbearance; the innocence which symbolizes the heavenly, and the simplicity which is most alien from the worldly, are kept up in perpetual remembrance, and their ideals are continually refreshed. A purpose of the same nature is answered by the higher literature, viz., the literature of power. What do you learn from *Paradise Lost*? Nothing at all. What do you learn from a cookery-book? Something new—something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery-book on a higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe, is *power*, that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upwards—a step ascending as upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth. *All* the steps of knowledge, from first to last, carry you further on the same plane, but could never raise you one foot above your ancient level of

earth: whereas, the very *first* step in power is a flight—is an ascending movement into another element where earth is forgotten.

Were it not that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy, or of real life as it moves through chance and change, or of literature as it recombines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, etc., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually drop and dwindle. It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as contradistinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man; for the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal by suggestion or co-operation, with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scriptures speak not of the understanding, but of "*the understanding heart*,"—making the heart, *i.e.*, the great *intuitive* (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite. Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration. What is meant, for instance, by *poetic justice*?—It does not mean a justice that differs by its object from the ordinary justice of human jurisprudence; for then it must be confessedly a very bad kind of justice; but it means a justice that differs from common forensic justice by the degree in which it *attains* its object, a justice that is more omnipotent over its own ends, as dealing—not with the refractory elements of earthly life—but with the elements of its own creation, and with materials flexible to its own purest preconceptions. It is certain that, were it not for the literature of power, these ideals would often remain amongst us as mere arid notional forms: whereas, by the creative forces of man put forth in literature, they gain

a vernal life of restoration, and germinate into vital activities.

The commonest novel, by moving in alliance with human fears and hopes, with human instincts of wrong and right, sustains and quickens those affections. Calling them into action, it rescues them from torpor. And hence the pre-eminency over all authors that merely *teach*, of the meanest that *moves*; or that teaches, if at all, indirectly *by* moving. The very highest work that has ever existed in the literature of knowledge, is but a *provisional* work: a book upon trial and sufferance, and *quamdiu bene se gesserit*. Let its teaching be even partially revised, let it be but expanded, nay, even let its teaching be but placed in a better order, and instantly it is superseded. Whereas the feeblest works in the literature of power, surviving at all, survive as finished and unalterable amongst men. For instance, the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was a book *militant* on earth from the first. In all stages of its progress it would have to fight for its existence: 1st, as regards absolute truth; 2dly, when that combat was over, as regards its form or mode of presenting the truth. And as soon as a La Place, or anybody else, builds higher upon the foundations laid by this book, effectually he throws it out of the sunshine into decay and darkness; by weapons won from this book he superannuates and destroys this book, so that soon the name of Newton remains, as a mere *nominis umbra*, but his book, as a living power, has transmigrated into other forms. Now, on the contrary, the *Iliad*, the *Prometheus* of Æschylus,—the *Othello* or *King Lear*,—the *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*,—and the *Paradise Lost*, are not militant but triumphant for ever as long as the languages exist in which they speak or can be taught to speak. They never *can* transmigrate into new incarnations. To reproduce *these* in new forms, or variations, even if in some things they should be improved, would be to plagiarize. A good steam-engine is properly superseded by a better. But one lovely pastoral valley is not superseded by another, nor a statue of Praxiteles by a statue of Michael Angelo. These things

are separated not by imparity, but by disparity. They are not thought of as unequal under the same standard, but as different in *kind*, and if otherwise equal, as equal under a different standard. Human works of immortal beauty and works of nature in one respect stand on the same footing; they never absolutely repeat each other; never approach so near as not to differ; and they differ not as better and worse, or simply by more and less: they differ by undecipherable and incommunicable differences, that cannot be caught by mimicries, that cannot be reflected in the mirror of copies, that cannot become ponderable in the scales of vulgar comparison.

* * * * *

All the literature of knowledge builds only ground-nests, that are swept away by floods, or confounded by the plough; but the literature of power builds nests in aërial altitudes of temples sacred from violation, or of forests inaccessible to fraud. *This* is a great prerogative of the *power* literature; and it is a greater which lies in the mode of its influence. The *knowledge* literature, like the fashion of this world, passeth away. An Encyclopædia is its abstract; and, in this respect, it may be taken for its speaking symbol—that, before one generation has passed, an Encyclopædia is superannuated; for it speaks through the dead memory and unimpassioned understanding, which have not the repose of higher faculties, but are continually enlarging and varying their phylacteries. But all literature, properly so called—literature *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, for the very same reason that it is so much more durable than the literature of knowledge, is (and by the very same proportion it is) more intense and electrically searching in its impressions. The directions in which the tragedy of this planet has trained our human feelings to play, and the combinations into which the poetry of this planet has thrown our human passions of love and hatred, of admiration and contempt, exercise a power bad or good over human life, that cannot be contemplated, when stretching through many generations, without a sentiment allied to

awe.¹ And of this let every one be assured—that he owes to the impassioned books which he has read, many a thousand more of emotions than he can consciously trace back to them. Dim by their origination, these emotions yet arise in him, and mould him through life like forgotten incidents of his childhood.

II

Here, however, to prevent all mistakes, let me establish one necessary distinction. The word *literature* is a perpetual source of confusion, because it is used in two senses, and those senses liable to be confounded with each other. In a philosophical use of the word, literature is the direct and adequate antithesis of books of knowledge. But, in a popular use, it is a mere term of convenience for expressing inclusively the total books in a language. In this latter sense, a dictionary, a grammar, a spelling-book, an almanac, a pharmacopœia, a Parliamentary report, a system of farriery, a treatise on billiards, the Court Calendar, etc., belong to the literature. But, in the philosophical sense, not only would it be ludicrous to reckon these as parts of the literature, but even books of much higher pretensions must be excluded—as, for instance, books of voyages and travels, and generally all books in which the matter to be communicated is paramount to the manner or form of its communication (“ornari res ipsa negat, contenta doceri”).

¹ The reason why the broad distinctions between the two literatures of power and knowledge so little fix the attention, lies in the fact, that a vast proportion of books—history, biography, travels, miscellaneous essays, etc., lying in a middle zone, confound these distinctions by interblending them. All that we call “amusement” or “entertainment,” is a diluted form of the power belonging to passion, and also a mixed form; and where threads of direct *instruction* intermingle in the texture with these threads of *power*, this absorption of the duality into one representative *nuance* neutralizes the separate perception of either. Fused into a *tertium quid*, or neutral state, they disappear to the popular eye as the repelling forces, which, in fact, they are.

It is difficult to construct the idea of "literature" with severe accuracy; for it is a fine art—the supreme fine art, and liable to the difficulties which attend such a subtle notion; in fact, a severe construction of the idea must be the *result* of a philosophical investigation into this subject, and cannot precede it. But, for the sake of obtaining some expression for literature that may answer our present purpose, let us throw the question into another form. I have said that the antithesis of literature is books of knowledge. Now, what is that antithesis to *knowledge*, which is here implicitly latent in the word literature? The vulgar antithesis is *pleasure* ("aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetæ"). Books, we are told, propose to *instruct* or to *amuse*. Indeed! However, not to spend any words upon it, I suppose you will admit that this wretched antithesis will be of no service to us. And, by the way, let me remark to you, in this, as in other cases, how men by their own errors of understanding, by feeble thinking, and inadequate distinctions, forge chains of meanness and servility for themselves. For, this miserable alternative being once admitted, observe what follows. In which class of books does the *Paradise Lost* stand? Among those which instruct, or those which *amuse*? Now, if a man answers among those which instruct, he lies; for there is no instruction in it, nor could be in any great poem, according to the meaning which the word must bear in this distinction, unless it is meant that it should involve its own antithesis. But if he says, "No; amongst those which amuse," then what a beast must he be to degrade, and in this way, what has done the most of any human work to raise and dignify human nature. But the truth is, you see that the idiot does not wish to degrade it; on the contrary, he would willingly tell a lie in its favour, if that would be admitted; but such is the miserable state of slavery to which he has reduced himself by his own puny distinction; for, as soon as he hops out of one of his little cells, he is under a necessity of hopping into the other. The true antithesis to knowledge, in this case, is not *pleasure*, but

power. All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge. Now, if it be asked what is meant by communicating power, I, in my turn, would ask by what name a man would designate the case in which I should be made to feel vividly, and with a vital consciousness, emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting, and which had previously lain unawakened, and hardly within the dawn of consciousness—as myriads of modes of feeling are at this moment in every human mind for want of a poet to organize them? I say, when these inert and sleeping forms *are* organized, when these possibilities *are* actualized, is this conscious and living possession of mine *power*, or what is it?

When, in *King Lear*, the height, and depth, and breadth, of human passion is revealed to us, and, for the purposes of a sublime antagonism, is revealed in the weakness of an old man's nature, and in one night two worlds of storm are brought face to face—the human world, and the world of physical nature—mirrors of each other, semichoral antiphonies, strophe and antistrophe heaving with rival convulsions, and with the double darkness of night and madness,—when I am thus suddenly startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me, is this power, or what may I call it? Space, again, what is it in most men's minds? The lifeless form of the world without us, a postulate of the geometrician, with no more vitality or real existence to their feelings than the square root of two. But, if Milton has been able to *inform* this empty theatre, peopling it with Titanic shadows, forms that sat at the eldest counsels of the infant world, chaos and original night,—

Ghostly shapes,
To meet at noontide, Fear and trembling Hope,
Death the Skeleton,
And Time the Shadow,—

so that, from being a thing to inscribe with diagrams, it has become under his hands a vital agent on the human

mind,—I presume that I may justly express the tendency of the *Paradise Lost*, by saying that it communicates power; a pretension far above all communication of knowledge. Henceforth, therefore, I shall use the antithesis power and knowledge as the most philosophical expression for literature (that is, *Literae Humaniores*) and anti-literature (that is, *Literae didacticae*—*Παιδεία*).

RHETORIC

[Rhetoric, for some reason, is regarded with extreme disfavour by most latter-day English critics; which is the more remarkable since some of the very greatest of English writers are nothing if not rhetorical. Milton and Byron, the only two of our poets besides Shakespeare who have gained a world-wide celebrity, are rhetorical poets; our rhetorical prose, Milton's, Bacon's, Jeremy Taylor's, Carlyle's, Ruskin's, De Quincey's own, is the noblest of its kind in modern literature. There is, of course, a true and a false rhetoric as there is a true and a false eloquence. The distinction is ably drawn in this Essay; which moreover is, in its best passages, a rich example of what De Quincey specifically meant by rhetoric—namely, the art of ornate and allusive prose, which depends for its effect not merely on lucid exposition and logical statement, but on illuminative fancy, imaginative illustration, and a wealth of verbal decoration. To read De Quincey's notices of his masters and teachers, the great rhetoricians of the seventeenth century, is to be convinced that English prose cannot for ever be denied its most characteristic quality in favour of a Gallic limpidity and thinness which may be suited to the Latin genius but is alien from our own.]

The Essay was contributed to *Blackwood* in December 1828 as a review of Whateley's *Elements of Rhetoric*.]

WHATSOEVER is certain, or matter of fixed science, can be no subject for the rhetorician: where it is possible for the understanding to be convinced, no field is open for rhetorical persuasion. Absolute certainty and fixed science transcend opinion, and exclude the probable. The province of rhetoric, whether meant for an influence upon the actions, or simply upon the belief, lies amongst that vast field of cases where there is a *pro* and a *con*, with the chance of right and wrong, true and false, dis-

tributed in varying proportions between them. There is also an immense range of truths, where there are no chances at all concerned, but the affirmative and the negative are both true; as, for example, the goodness of human nature and its wickedness; the happiness of human life and its misery; the charms of knowledge, and its hollowness; the fragility of human prosperity, in the eye of religious meditation, and its security, as estimated by worldly confidence and youthful hope. In all such cases the rhetorician exhibits his art by giving an impulse to one side, and by withdrawing the mind so steadily from all thoughts or images which support the other, as to leave it practically under the possession of a one-sided estimate.

Upon this theory, what relation to rhetoric shall we assign to style and the ornamental arts of composition? In some respect they seem liable to the same objection as that which Aristotle has urged against appeals to the passions; both are extra-essential, or *ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος*; they are subjective arts, not objective; that is, they do not affect the thing which is to be surveyed, but the eye of him who is to survey. Yet, at a banquet, the epicure holds himself not more obliged to the cook for the venison, than to the physician who braces his stomach to enjoy. And any arts which conciliate regard to the speaker, indirectly promote the effect of his arguments. On this account, and because (under the severest limitation of rhetoric) they are in many cases indispensable to the perfect interpretation of the thoughts, we may admit arts of style and ornamental composition as the ministerial part of rhetoric. But with regard to the passions, as contended for by Dr. Campbell, it is a sufficient answer that they are already pre-occupied by what is called *Eloquence*.

Coleridge, as we have often heard, is in the habit of drawing the line with much philosophical beauty between rhetoric and eloquence. On this topic we were never so fortunate as to hear him: but if we are here called upon for a distinction, we shall satisfy our immediate purpose by a very plain and brief one. By Elo-

quence, we understand the overflow of powerful feelings upon occasions fitted to excite them. But Rhetoric is the art of aggrandizing and bringing out into strong relief, by means of various and striking thoughts, some aspect of truth which of itself is supported by no spontaneous feelings, and therefore rests upon artificial aids.

Greece, as may well be imagined, was the birthplace of Rhetoric; to which of the Fine Arts was it not? And here, in one sense of the word Rhetoric, the art had its consummation: for the theory, or *ars docens*, was taught with a fulness and an accuracy by the Grecian masters not afterwards approached. In particular, it was so taught by Aristotle, whose system we are disposed to agree with Dr. Whately in pronouncing the best, as regards the primary purpose of a teacher; though otherwise, for elegance and as a practical model in the art he was expounding, neither Aristotle, nor any less austere among the Greek rhetoricians, has any pretensions to measure himself with Quintilian. In reality, for a triumph over the difficulties of the subject, and as a lesson on the possibility of imparting grace to the treatment of scholastic topics, naturally as intractable as that of Grammar or Prosody, there is no such *chef-d'œuvre* to this hour in any literature, as the Institutions of Quintilian. Laying this one case out of the comparison, however, the Greek superiority was indisputable.

Yet how is it to be explained, that with these advantages on the side of the Greek rhetoric as an *ars docens*, rhetoric as a practical art (the *ars utens*) never made any advances amongst the Greeks to the brilliancy which it attained in Rome? Up to a certain period, and throughout the palmy state of the Greek republics, we may account for it thus: Rhetoric, in its finest and most absolute burnish, may be called an *eloquentia umbratica*; that is, it aims at an elaborate form of beauty, which shrinks from the strife of business, and could neither arise nor make itself felt in a tumultuous assembly. Certain features, it is well known, and peculiar styles of countenance, which are impressive in a drawing-room, become ineffective on a public stage. The fine tooling

and delicate tracery of the cabinet artist is lost upon a building of colossal proportions. Extemporaneousness, again, a favourable circumstance to impassioned eloquence, is death to Rhetoric. Two characteristics indeed there were, of a Greek popular assembly, which must have operated fatally on the rhetorician—its fervour, in the first place; and, secondly, the coarseness of a real interest. All great rhetoricians in selecting their subject have shunned the determinate cases of real life: and even in the single instance of a deviation from the rule—that of the author (whoever he be) of the Declamations attributed to Quintilian—the cases are shaped with so romantic a generality, and so slightly circumstantiated, as to allow him all the benefit of pure abstractions.

We can readily understand, therefore, why the fervid oratory of the Athenian assemblies, and the intense reality of its interest, should stifle the growth of rhetoric: the smoke, tarnish, and demoniac glare of Vesuvius easily eclipse the pallid coruscations of the aurora borealis. And in fact, amongst the greater orators of Greece, there is not a solitary gleam of rhetoric: Isocrates may have a little, being (to say the truth) neither orator nor rhetorician in any eminent sense; Demosthenes has none. But when those great thunders had subsided which reached “to Macedon and Artaxerxes’ throne,” when the “fierce democracy” itself had perished, and Greece had fallen under the common circumstances of the Roman empire, how came it that Greek rhetoric did not blossom concurrently with Roman? Vegetate it did; and a rank crop of weeds grew up under the name of Rhetoric, down to the times of the Emperor Julian and his friend Libanius (both of whom, by the way, were as worthless writers as have ever abused the Greek language). But this part of Greek literature is a desert with no oasis. The fact is, if it were required to assign the two bodies of writers who have exhibited the human understanding in the most abject poverty, and whose works by no possibility emit a casual scintillation of wit, fancy, just thinking, or

good writing, we should certainly fix upon Greek rhetoricians and Italian critics. Amongst the whole mass there is not a page, that any judicious friend to literature would wish to reprove from destruction. And in both cases we apprehend that the possibility of so much inanity is due in part to the quality of the two languages. The diffuseness and loose structure of Greek style unfit it for the closeness, condensation, and *τὸ ἀγχίστροφον* of rhetoric; the melodious beauty of the mere sounds, which both in the Italian and in the Greek are combined with much majesty, dwells upon the ear so delightfully, that in no other language is it so easy as in these two to write with little or no meaning, and to flow along through a whole wilderness of inanity, without particularly rousing the reader's disgust.

In the literature of Rome it is that we find the true El Dorado of rhetoric, as we might expect from the sinewy compactness of the language. Livy, and, above all preceding writers, Ovid, display the greatest powers of rhetoric in forms of composition, which were not particularly adapted to favour that talent. The contest of Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles, in one of the later books of the *Metamorphoses*, is a *chef-d'œuvre* of rhetoric, considering its metrical form; for metre, and especially the flowing heroic hexameter, is no advantage to the rhetorician.¹ The two Plinys, Lucan (though again under the disadvantage of verse), Petronius Arbiter, and Quintilian, but above all, the Senecas (for a Spanish cross appears to improve the quality of the rhetorician), have left a body of rhetorical composition such as no modern nation has rivalled. Even the most brilliant of these writers, however, were occasionally surpassed in particular *bravuras* of rhetoric by several of

¹ This, added to the style and quality of his poems, makes it the more remarkable that Virgil should have been deemed a rhetorician. Yet so it was. Walsh notices, in the *Life of Virgil* which he furnished for his friend Dryden's Translation, that "his (Virgil's) rhetoric was in such general esteem, that lectures were read upon it in the reign of Tiberius, and the subject of declamations taken out of him."

the Latin fathers, particularly Tertullian, Arnobius, St. Austin, and a writer whose name we cannot at this moment recall. In fact, a little African blood operated as genially in this respect as Spanish, whilst an Asiatic cross was inevitably fatal, by prompting a diffusion and inflation of style radically hostile to the condensation of keen, arrowy, rhetoric. Partly from this cause, and partly because they wrote in an unfavourable language, the Greek fathers are, one and all, Birmingham rhetoricians. Even Gregory Nazianzen is so, with submission to Messieurs of the Port Royal and other bigoted critics who have pronounced him at the very top of the tree among the fine writers of antiquity. Undoubtedly he has a turgid style of mouthy grandiloquence (though often the merest bombast); but for polished rhetoric he is singularly unfitted, by inflated habits of thinking, by loitering diffuseness, and a dreadful trick of calling names. The spirit of personal invective is peculiarly adverse to the coolness of rhetoric. As to Chrysostom and Basil, with less of pomp and swagger than Gregory, they have not at all more of rhetorical burnish and compression. Upon the whole, looking back through the dazzling files of the ancient rhetoricians, we are disposed to rank the Senecas and Tertullian as the leaders of the band; for St. Austin, in his *Confessions*, and wherever he becomes peculiarly interesting, is apt to be impassioned and fervent in a degree which makes him break out of the proper pace of rhetoric. He is matched to trot, and is continually breaking into a gallop. Indeed, his *Confessions* have in parts, particularly in those which relate to the death of his young friend and his own frenzy of grief, all that real passion which is only imagined in the *Confessions* of Rousseau, under a preconception derived from his known character and unhappy life. By the time of the Emperor Justinian (say A.D. 530), or in the interval between that time and the era of Mahomet (A.D. 620), which interval we regard as the common *crepusculum* between ancient and modern history, all rhetoric (as the professional pretension of a class) seems to have finally expired.

In the literature of modern Europe, rhetoric has been cultivated with success. But this remark applies only with any force to a period which is now long past; and it is probable, upon various considerations, that such another period will never revolve. The rhetorician's art in its glory and power has silently faded away before the stern tendencies of the age; and if, by any peculiarity of taste or strong determination of the intellect, a rhetorician, *en grand costume*, were again to appear amongst us, it is certain that he would have no better welcome than a stare of surprise as a posture-maker or balancer, not more elevated in the general estimate, but far less amusing, than the acrobat, or funambulist, or equestrian gymnast. No; the age of rhetoric like that of chivalry has passed amongst forgotten things; and the rhetorician can have no more chance for returning, than the rhapsodist of early Greece or the troubadour of romance. So multiplied are the modes of intellectual enjoyment in modern times, that the choice is absolutely distracted; and in a boundless theatre of pleasures, to be had at little or no cost of intellectual activity, it would be marvellous indeed if any considerable audience could be found for an exhibition which presupposes a state of tense exertion on the part both of auditor and performer. To hang upon one's own thoughts as an object of conscious interest, to play with them, to watch and pursue them through a maze of inversions, evolutions, and harlequin changes, implies a condition of society either like that in the monastic ages, forced to introvert its energies from mere defect of books (whence arose the scholastic metaphysics, admirable for its subtlety, but famishing the mind, whilst it sharpened its edge in one exclusive direction); or, if it implies no absolute starvation of intellect, as in the case of the Roman rhetoric, which arose upon a considerable (though not very various) literature, it proclaims at least a quiescent state of the public mind, unoccupied with daily novelties, and at leisure from the agitations of eternal change.

Growing out of the same condition of society, there is another cause at work which will for ever prevent the

resurrection of rhetoric, viz., the necessities of public business, its vast extent, complexity, fulness of details, and consequent vulgarity, as compared with that of the ancients. The very same cause, by the way, furnishes an answer to the question moved by Hume, in one of his essays, with regard to the declension of eloquence in our deliberative assemblies. Eloquence, or at least that which is senatorial and forensic, has languished under the same changes of society which have proved fatal to rhetoric. The political economy of the ancient republics, and their commerce, were simple and unelaborate; the system of their public services, both martial and civil, was arranged on the most naked and manageable principles; for we must not confound the perplexity in our modern explanations of these things, with a perplexity in the things themselves. The foundation of these differences was in the differences of domestic life. Personal wants being few, both from climate and from habit, and, in the great majority of the citizens, limited almost to the pure necessities of nature; hence arose, for the mass of the population, the possibility of surrendering themselves, much more than with us, either to the one paramount business of the state, war, or to a state of Indian idleness. Rome, in particular, during the ages of her growing luxury, must be regarded as a nation supported by other nations; by largesses, in effect; that is to say, by the plunder of conquest. Living, therefore, upon foreign alms, or upon corn purchased by the product of tribute or of spoils, a nation could readily dispense with that expansive development of her internal resources, upon which modern Europe has been forced by the more equal distribution of power amongst the civilized world.

The changes, which have followed in the functions of our popular assemblies, correspond to the great revolution here described. Suppose yourself an ancient Athenian, at some customary display of Athenian oratory, what will be the topics? Peace or war, vengeance for public wrongs, or mercy to prostrate submission, national honour and national gratitude, glory and shame, and every aspect of open appeal to the primal

sensibilities of man. On the other hand, enter an English Parliament, having the most of a popular character in its constitution and practice that is anywhere to be found in the Christendom of this day, and the subject of debate will probably be a road-bill, a bill for enabling a coal-gas company to assume certain privileges against a competitor in oil-gas, a bill for disfranchising a corrupt borough, or perhaps some technical point of form in the Exchequer Bills' bill. So much is the face of public business vulgarized by details. The same spirit of differences extends to forensic eloquence. Grecian and Roman pleadings are occupied with questions of elementary justice, large and diffusive, apprehensible even to the uninstructed, and connecting themselves at every step with powerful and tempestuous feelings. In British trials, on the contrary, the field is foreclosed against any interest of so elevating a nature, because the rights and wrongs of the case are almost inevitably absorbed to an unlearned eye by the technicalities of the law, or by the intricacy of the facts.

But this is not always the case; doubtless not; subjects for eloquence, and therefore eloquence, will sometimes arise in our senate and our courts of justice. And in one respect our British displays are more advantageously circumstanced than the ancient, being more conspicuously brought forward into effect by their contrast to the ordinary course of business.

Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,
 Since seldom coming, in the long year set,
 Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
 Or captain jewels in the carcanet.¹

But still the objection of Hume remains unimpeached as to the fact that eloquence is a rarer growth of modern than of ancient civil polity, even in those countries which have the advantage of free institutions. Now why is this? The letter of this objection is sustained, but substantially it is disarmed, so far as its purpose was to argue any declension on the part of Christian nations, by

¹ Shakspeare, Sonnet 52.

this explanation of ours, which traces the impoverished condition of civil eloquence to the complexity of public business.

But eloquence in one form or other is immortal, and will never perish so long as there are human hearts moving under the agitations of hope and fear, love and passionate hatred. And, in particular to us of the modern world, as an endless source of indemnification for what we have lost in the simplicity of our social systems, we have received a new dowry of eloquence, and *that* of the highest order, in the sanctities of our religion, a field unknown to antiquity, for the pagan religions did not produce much poetry, and of oratory none at all.

On the other hand, that cause, which, operating upon eloquence, has but extinguished it under a single direction, to rhetoric has been unconditionally fatal. Eloquence is not banished from the public business of this country as useless, but as difficult, and as not spontaneously arising from topics such as generally furnish the staple of debate. But rhetoric, if attempted on a formal scale, would be summarily exploded as pure foppery and trifling with time. Falstaff, on the field of battle, presenting his bottle of sack for a pistol, or Polonius with his quibbles, could not appear a more unseasonable *plaisanteur* than a rhetorician alighting from the clouds upon a public assembly in Great Britain met for the despatch of business.

Under these malign aspects of the modern structure of society, a structure to which the whole world will be moulded as it becomes civilized, there can be no room for any revival of rhetoric in public speaking; and from the same and other causes, acting upon the standard of public taste, quite as little room in written composition. In spite, however, of the tendencies to this consummation, which have been long ripening, it is a fact, that, next after Rome, England is the country in which rhetoric prospered most, at a time when science was unborn as a popular interest, and the commercial activities of after-times were yet sleeping in their rudiments. This was in the period from the latter end of the sixteenth to

the middle of the seventeenth century; and, though the English rhetoric was less rigorously true to its own ideal than the Roman, and often modulated into a higher key of impassioned eloquence, yet unquestionably in some of its qualities it remains a monument of the very finest rhetorical powers.

Omitting Sir Philip Sidney, and omitting his friend, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (in whose prose there are some bursts of pathetic eloquence, as there is of rhetoric in his verse, though too often harsh and cloudy), the first very eminent rhetorician in the English literature is Donne. Dr. Johnson inconsiderately classes him in company with Cowley, etc., under the title of *Metaphysical* Poets: metaphysical they were not; *Rhetorical* would have been a more accurate designation. In saying *that*, however, we must remind our readers that we revert to the original use of the word *Rhetoric*, as laying the principal stress upon the management of the thoughts, and only a secondary one upon the ornaments of style. Few writers have shown a more extraordinary compass of powers than Donne; for he combined what no other man has ever done—the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty. Massy diamonds compose the very substance of his poem on the Metempsychosis, thoughts and descriptions which have the fervent and gloomy sublimity of Ezekiel or Æschylus, whilst a diamond dust of rhetorical brilliances is strewed over the whole of his occasional verses and his prose. No criticism was ever more unhappy than that of Dr. Johnson's, which denounces all this artificial display as so much perversion of taste. There cannot be a falser thought than this; for, upon that principle, a whole class of compositions might be vicious by conforming to its own ideal. The artifice and machinery of rhetoric furnishes in its degree as legitimate a basis for intellectual pleasure as any other; that the pleasure is of an inferior order, can no more attain the idea or model of the composition, than it can impeach the excellence of an epigram that is not a tragedy. Every species of composition is to be tried

by its own laws; and if Dr. Johnson had urged explicitly (what was evidently moving in his thoughts), that a metrical structure, by holding forth the promise of poetry, defrauds the mind of its just expectations, he would have said what is notoriously false. Metre is open to any form of composition, provided it will aid the expression of the thoughts; and the only sound objection to it is, that it has *not* done so. Weak criticism, indeed, is that which condemns a copy of verses under the ideal of poetry, when the mere substitution of another name and classification suffices to evade the sentence, and to reinstate the composition in its rights as rhetoric. It may be very true that the age of Donne gave too much encouragement to his particular vein of composition; that, however, argues no depravity of taste, but a taste erring only in being too limited and exclusive.

The next writers of distinction, who came forward as rhetoricians, were Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Milton in many of his prose works. They labour under opposite defects: Burton is too quaint, fantastic, and disjointed. Milton too slow, solemn, and continuous. In the one we see the flutter of a parachute; in the other the stately and voluminous gyrations of an ascending balloon. Agile movement, and a certain degree of fancifulness, are indispensable to rhetoric. But Burton is not so much fanciful as capricious; his motion is not the motion of freedom, but of lawlessness; he does not dance, but caper. Milton, on the other hand, *polonaises* with a grand Castilian air, in paces too sequacious and processional; even in his passages of merriment, and when stung into a quicker motion by personal disdain for an unworthy antagonist, his thoughts and his imagery still appear to move to the music of the organ.

In some measure it is a consequence of these peculiarities, and so far it is the more a duty to allow for them, that the rhetoric of Milton though wanting in animation is unusually superb in its colouring; its very monotony is derived from the sublime unity of the presiding impulse; and hence, it sometimes ascends into eloquence of the highest kind, and sometimes even into

manding passion, intensity, and solemnity of his exalted theme, which gave a final unity to the tumultuous motions of his intellect. The only very obvious defects of Taylor were in the mechanical part of his art, in the mere *technique*; he writes like one who never revises, nor tries the effect upon his ear of his periods as musical wholes; and in the syntax and connection of the parts seems to have been habitually careless of slight blemishes.

Jeremy Taylor¹ died in a few years after the Restora-

¹ In retracing the history of English rhetoric, it may strike the reader that we have made some capital omissions. But in these he will find we have been governed by sufficient reasons. Shakspeare is no doubt a rhetorician, *majorum gentium*; but he is so much more, that scarcely an instance is to be found of his rhetoric which does not pass by fits into a higher element of eloquence or poetry. The first and the last acts, for instance, of the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which, in point of composition, is perhaps the most superb work in the language, and beyond all doubt from the loom of Shakspeare, would have been the most gorgeous rhetoric, had they not happened to be something far better. The supplications of the widowed Queens to Theseus, the invocations of their tutelary divinities by Palamon and Arcite, the death of Arcite, etc., are finished in a more elaborate style of excellence than any other almost of Shakspeare's most felicitous scenes. In their first intention, they were perhaps merely rhetorical; but the furnace of composition has transmuted their substance. Indeed, specimens of mere rhetoric would be better sought in some of the other great dramatists, who are under a less fatal necessity of turning everything they touch into the pure gold of poetry. Two other writers, with great original capacities for rhetoric, we have omitted in our list from separate considerations: we mean Sir Walter Raleigh and Lord Bacon. The first will hardly have been missed by the general reader; for his finest passages are dispersed through the body of his bulky history, and are touched with a sadness too pathetic, and of too personal a growth, to fulfil the conditions of a gay rhetoric as an art rejoicing in its own energies. With regard to Lord Bacon, the case is different. He had great advantages for rhetoric, being figurative and sensuous (as great thinkers must always be), and having no feelings too profound, or of a nature to disturb the balance of a pleasurable activity; but yet, if we except a few letters, and parts of a few speeches, he never comes forward as a rhetorician. The reason is, that being always in quest of absolute truth, he contemplates all subjects—not through the rhetorical fancy, which is most excited by mere seeming resemblances, and such as can only sustain themselves under a single phasis, but through the philosophic fancy, or that which rests upon real

tion. Sir Thomas Browne, though at that time nearly thirty years removed from the first surreptitious edition of his *Religio Medici*, lingered a little longer. But, when both were gone, it may be truly affirmed that the great oracles of rhetoric were finally silenced. South and Barrow, indeed, were brilliant dialecticians in different styles; but after Tillotson with his meagre intellect, his low key of feeling, and the smug and scanty draperies of his style, had announced a new era, English divinity ceased to be the racy vineyard that it had been in ages of ferment and struggle. Like the soil of Sicily (*vide* Sir H. Davy's *Agricultural Chemistry*), it was exhausted for ever by the tilth and rank fertility of its golden youth.

ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE IN MACBETH

[This extremely acute and suggestive fragment of criticism was one of the "Notes from the Pocket-Book of a late Opium-Eater," printed in the *London Magazine* in 1823, and reprinted thirty-seven years later in the last volume of the Collective Edition. It is a mere scrap; but it is like a pencil study by Michelangelo for an arm or a leg. It reveals the master's hand. Most other men would have made an elaborate essay out of this idea. De Quincey had intended to do so—a project which went the way of so many other of his unfulfilled intentions.]

FROM my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in Macbeth. It was this: the knocking at the gate, which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for

analogies. Another unfavourable circumstance, arising in fact out of the plethoric fulness of Lord B.'s mind, is the short-hand style of his composition, in which the connexions are seldom fully developed. It was the lively *mot* of a great modern poet, speaking of Lord B.'s Essays, "that they are not plants, but seeds; not oaks, but acorns."

flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life; an instinct which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind (though different in degree) amongst all living creatures: this instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of "the poor beetle that we tread on," exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him* (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them,—not a sympathy of pity or approbation).¹ In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic; the fear of instant death smites him "with its petrific mace." But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred—which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look.

In *Macbeth*, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakspeare has introduced two murderers: and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated: but, though in *Macbeth* the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her,—yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of murder, the murderous mind of

¹ It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word, in a situation where it would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholar-like use of the word *sympathy*, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonym of the word *pity*, and hence, instead of saying "sympathy *with* another," many writers adopt the monstrous barbarism of "sympathy *for* another."

necessity is finally to be presumed in both. This was to be expressed; and on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, "the gracious Duncan," and adequately to expound "the deep damnation of his taking off," this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature, *i.e.*, the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man—was gone, vanished, extinct; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader's attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister in a fainting fit, he may chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle is *that* in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis, on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man—if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting, as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction.

Now apply this to the case in Macbeth. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in; and the

murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is "unsexed;" Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!

MILTON

[It is much to be regretted that De Quincey never found time or opportunity for a detailed examination of the life and writings of Milton. There was no poet whom he had studied more deeply, none whom he admired so much. To him Milton was indeed the Prince of Poets, and he probably derived more satisfaction from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* than from Homer, Virgil, Dante, and I daresay even Shakespeare. He admired Milton's learning, his organ-like harmonies, his austerity, and his splendid rhetoric; and above all that impression of power and emotional energy which he regarded as the supreme quality in literature. There are many penetrating fragments of Miltonic criticism and appreciation scattered through De Quincey's volumes. The passage here given is from a short essay on Milton first published in *Blackwood* in December 1839.]

MILTON is not an author amongst authors, not a poet amongst poets, but a power amongst powers; and the *Paradise Lost* is not a book amongst books, not a poem amongst poems, but a central force amongst forces. Let me explain. There is this great distinction amongst books: some, though possibly the best in their class, are still no more than books—not indispensable, not incapable of supplementary representation by other books. If they had never been—if their place had continued for ages unfilled—not the less, upon a sufficient excitement arising, there would always have been found the ability, either directly to fill up the vacancy, or at least to meet the same passion virtually, though by a work differing in form. Thus, supposing Butler to have died in youth, and the *Hudibras* to have been intercepted by his premature death, still the ludicrous aspects of the Parliamentary War, and its fighting saints, were too striking to have perished. If not in a narrative form, the case would have come forward in the drama. Puritanical sanctity, in collision with the ordinary interests of life, and with its militant propensities, offered too striking a field for the Satiric Muse, in any case, to have passed in total neglect. The impulse was too strong for repression—it was a volcanic agency, that, by

some opening or other, must have worked a way for itself to the upper air. Yet Butler was a most original poet, and a creator within his own province. But, like many another original mind, there is little doubt that he quelled and repressed, by his own excellence, other minds of the same cast. Mere despair of excelling him, so far as not, after all, to seem imitators, drove back others who would have pressed into that arena, if not already brilliantly filled. Butler failing, there would have been another Butler, either in the same, or in some analogous form.

But, with regard to Milton and the Miltonic power, the case is far otherwise. If the man had failed, the power would have failed. In that mode of power which he wielded, the function was exhausted in the man—the species was identified with the individual—the poetry was incarnated in the poet.

Let it be remembered, that, of all powers which act upon man through his intellectual nature, the very rarest is that which we moderns call the *sublime*. The Grecians had apparently no word for it, unless it were that which they meant by τὸ σεμνόν: for ἕψος was a comprehensive expression for all qualities which gave a character of life or animation to the composition, such even as were philosophically opposed to the sublime. In the Roman poetry, and especially in Lucan, at times also in Juvenal, there is an exhibition of a moral sublime, perfectly distinct from anything known to the Greek poetry. The delineations of republican grandeur, as expressing itself through the principal leaders in the Roman camps, or the trampling under foot of ordinary superstitions, as given in the reasons assigned to Labienus for passing the oracle of the Libyan Jupiter unconsulted, are in a style to which there is nothing corresponding in the whole Grecian literature, nor would they have been comprehensible to an Athenian. The famous line—“Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris,” and the brief review of such questions as might be worthy of an oracular god, with the summary declaration, that every one of those points we know

already by the light of nature, and could not know them better though Jupiter Ammon himself were to impress them on our attention—

Scimus, et haec nobis non altius inseret Ammon:

We know it, and no Ammon will ever sink it deeper into our hearts;

all this is truly Roman in its sublimity; and so exclusively Roman, that there, and not in poets like the Augustan, expressly modelling their poems on Grecian types, ought the Roman mind to be studied.

On the other hand, for that species of the sublime which does not rest purely and merely on moral energies, but on a synthesis between man and nature—for what may properly be called the Ethico-physical Sublime—there is but one great model surviving in the Greek poetry; viz., the gigantic drama of the Prometheus crucified on Mount Elborus. And this drama differs so much from everything else, even in the poetry of Æschylus, as the mythus itself differs so much from all the rest of the Grecian Mythology (belonging apparently to an age and a people more gloomy, austere, and nearer to the *incunabula mundi*, than those which bred the gay and sunny superstitions of Greece), that much curiosity and speculation have naturally gathered round the subject of late years. Laying this one insulated case apart, and considering that the Hebrew poetry of Isaiah and Ezekiel, as having the benefit of inspiration, does not lie within the just limits of competition, we may affirm that there is no human composition which can be challenged as constitutionally sublime—sublime equally by its conception and by its execution, or as uniformly sublime from first to last, excepting the *Paradise Lost*. In Milton only, first and last, is the power of the sublime revealed. In Milton only does this great agency blaze and glow as a furnace kept up to a white heat—without suspicion of collapse.

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF POETRY

[In the passages given below from an essay on Pope, De Quincey exhibits his faculty for laying down broad critical principles and rules. It is in these generalizations, buttressed on allusions and illustrations, rather than in the appreciation of particular works and authors (where his taste was apt to be distorted by prejudices or personal prepossessions), that his powers as a critic are seen to the best advantage. He had thought out his aesthetic philosophy, and his conclusions are always worth attention, even though in the application his judgement sometimes misled him. For Pope he had, as we might expect, a very limited share of the enthusiasm which was exhibited by Byron; but he did justice to "the most brilliant of all wits who have at any period applied themselves to the poetic treatment of human manners." This sentence is from the article on Pope which De Quincey wrote for the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a careful and rather elaborate study. The excursus on didactic poetry occurs in a paper (reprinted by De Quincey in vol. ix of the Collective Edition) contributed to the *North British Review* in 1848.]

IF the question were asked, What ought to have been the best among Pope's poems? most people would answer, the *Essay on Man*. If the question were asked, What is the worst? all people of judgment would say, the *Essay on Man*. Whilst yet in its rudiments, this poem claimed the first place by the promise of its subject; when finished, by the utter failure of its execution, it fell into the last. The case possesses a triple interest—first, as illustrating the character of Pope modified by his situation; secondly, as illustrating the true nature of that "didactic" poetry to which this particular poem is usually referred; thirdly, as illustrating the anomalous condition to which a poem so grand in its ambition has been reduced by the double disturbance of its proper movement; one disturbance through the position of Pope, another through his total misconception of didactic poetry. First, as regards Pope's position, it may seem odd—but it is not so—that a man's social position should overrule his intellect. The scriptural denunciation of riches, as a snare to any man that is striving to rise above worldly views, applies not at all less to the intel-

lect, and to any man seeking to ascend by some aërial arch of flight above ordinary intellectual efforts. Riches are fatal to those continuities of energy without which there is no success of that magnitude. Pope had £800 a year. *That* seems not so much. No, certainly not, supposing a wife and six children: but by accident Pope had no wife and no children. He was luxuriously at his ease; and this accident of his position in life fell in with a constitutional infirmity that predisposed him to indolence. Even his religious faith, by shutting him out from those public employments which else his great friends would have been too happy to obtain for him, aided his idleness, or sometimes invested it with a false character of conscientious self-denial. He cherished his religion too certainly as a plea for idleness. The result of all this was, that in his habits of thinking and of study (if *study* we can call a style of reading so desultory as *his*), Pope became a pure *dilettante*; in his intellectual eclecticism he was a mere epicure, toying with the delicacies and varieties of literature; revelling in the first bloom of moral speculations, but sated immediately; fastidiously retreating from all that threatened labour, or that exacted continuous attention; fathoming, throughout all his vagrancies amongst books, no foundation; filling up no chasms; and with all his fertility of thought expanding no germs of new life.

This career of luxurious indolence was the result of early luck which made it possible, and of bodily constitution which made it tempting. And when we remember his youthful introduction to the highest circles in the metropolis, where he never lost his footing, we cannot wonder that, without any sufficient motive for resistance, he should have sunk passively under his constitutional propensities, and should have fluttered amongst the flower-beds of literature or philosophy far more in the character of a libertine butterfly for casual enjoyment, than of a hard-working bee pursuing a pre-meditated purpose.

Such a character, strengthened by such a situation, would at any rate have disqualified Pope for composing

a work severely philosophic, or where philosophy did more than throw a coloured light of pensiveness upon some sentimental subject. If it were necessary that the philosophy should enter substantially into the very texture of the poem, furnishing its interest, and prescribing its movement, in that case Pope's combining and theorizing faculty would have shrunk as from the labour of building a pyramid. And wo to him where it did *not*, as really happened in the case of the *Essay on Man*. For his faculty of execution was under an absolute necessity of shrinking in horror from the enormous details of such an enterprise to which so rashly he had pledged himself. He was sure to find himself, as find himself he did, landed in the most dreadful embarrassment upon reviewing his own work. A work which, when finished, was not even begun; whose arches wanted their key-stones; whose parts had no coherency; and whose pillars, in the very moment of being thrown open to public view, were already crumbling into ruins. This utter prostration of Pope in a work so ambitious as an *Essay on Man*—a prostration predetermined from the first by the personal circumstances which we have noticed—was rendered still more irresistible, in the *second* place, by the general misconception in which Pope shared as to the very meaning of "didactic" poetry. Upon which point we pause to make an exposition of our own views.

What *is* didactic poetry? What does "didactic" mean when applied as a distinguishing epithet to such an idea as a poem? The predicate destroys the subject: it is a case of what logicians call *contradictio in adjecto*—the unsaying by means of an attribute the very thing which is the subject of that attribute you have just affirmed. No poetry can have the function of teaching. It is impossible that a variety of species should contradict the very purpose which contradistinguishes its *genus*. The several species differ partially; but not by the whole idea which differentiates their class. Poetry, or any one of the fine arts (all of which alike speak through the genial nature of man and his excited sensibilities), can

teach only as nature teaches, as forests teach, as the sea teaches, as infancy teaches, viz., by deep impulse, by hieroglyphic suggestion. Their teaching is not direct or explicit, but lurking, implicit, masked in deep incarnations. To teach formally and professedly, is to abandon the very differential character and principle of poetry. If poetry could condescend to teach anything, it would be truths moral or religious. But even these it can utter only through symbols and actions. The great moral, for instance, the last result of the *Paradise Lost*, is once formally announced, viz., *to justify the ways of God to man*; but it teaches itself only by diffusing its lesson through the entire poem in the total succession of events and purposes: and even this succession teaches it only when the whole is gathered into unity by a reflex act of meditation; just as the pulsation of the physical heart can exist only when all the parts in an animal system are locked into one organization.

To address the *insulated* understanding is to lay aside the Prospero's robe of poetry. The objection, therefore, to didactic poetry, as vulgarly understood, would be fatal even if there were none but this logical objection derived from its definition. To be in self-contradiction is, for any idea whatever, sufficiently to destroy itself. But it betrays a more obvious and practical contradiction when a little searched. If the true purpose of a man's writing a didactic poem were to teach, by what suggestion of idiocy should he choose to begin by putting on fetters? wherefore should the simple man volunteer to handcuff and manacle himself, were it only by the encumbrances of metre, and perhaps of rhyme? But these he will find the very least of his encumbrances. A far greater exists in the sheer necessity of omitting in any poem a vast variety of details, and even capital sections of the subject, unless they will bend to purposes of ornament. Now this collision between two purposes, the purpose of use in mere teaching, and the purpose of poetic delight, shows, by the uniformity of its solution, which of the two is the true purpose, and which the merely ostensible purpose. Had the true purpose been

instruction, the moment that this was found incompatible with a poetic treatment, as soon as it was seen that the sound education of the reader-pupil could not make way without loitering to gather poetic flowers, the stern cry of "duty" would oblige the poet to remember that he had dedicated himself to a didactic mission, and that he differed from other poets, as a monk from other men, by his vows of self-surrender to harsh ascetic functions. But, on the contrary, in the very teeth of this rule, wherever such a collision does really take place, and one or other of the supposed objects must give way, it is always the vulgar object of *teaching* (the pedagogue's object) which goes to the rear, whilst the higher object of poetic emotion moves on triumphantly. In reality not one didactic poet has ever yet attempted to use any parts or processes of the particular art which he made his theme, unless in so far as they seemed susceptible of poetic treatment, and only *because* they seemed so. Look at the poem of *Cyder*, by Philips, of the *Fleece* by Dyer, or (which is a still weightier example) at the *Georgics* of Virgil,—does any of these poets show the least anxiety for the correctness of your principles, or the delicacy of your manipulations in the worshipful arts they affect to teach? No; but they pursue these arts through every stage that offers any attractions of beauty. And in the very teeth of all anxiety for teaching, if there existed traditionally any very absurd way of doing a thing which happened to be eminently picturesque, and if, opposed to this, there were some improved mode that had recommended itself to poetic hatred by being dirty and ugly, the poet (if a good one) would pretend never to have heard of this disagreeable improvement. Or if obliged, by some rival poet, not absolutely to ignore it, he would allow that such a thing could be done, but hint that it was hateful to the Muses or Graces, and very likely to breed a pestilence.

This subordination of the properly didactic function to the poetic, which leaves the old essential distinction of poetry viz., its sympathy with the genial motions of man's heart, to override all accidents of special variation,

and shows that the essence of poetry never *can* be set aside by its casual modifications,—will be compromised by some loose thinkers, under the idea that in didactic poetry the element of instruction is, in fact, one element, though subordinate and secondary. Not at all. What we are denying is, that the element of instruction enters *at all* into didactic poetry. The subject of the *Georgics*, for instance, is Rural Economy as practised by Italian farmers: but Virgil not only *omits* altogether innumerable points of instruction insisted on as articles of religious necessity by Varro, Cato, Columella, etc., but, even as to those instructions which he *does* communicate, he is careless whether they are made technically intelligible or not. He takes very little pains to keep you from capital mistakes in *practising* his instructions: but he takes good care that you shall not miss any strong impression for the eye or the heart to which the rural process, or rural scene, may naturally lead. He pretends to give you a lecture on farming, in order to have an excuse for carrying you all round the beautiful farm. He pretends to show you a good plan for a farm-house, as the readiest means of veiling his impertinence in showing you the farmer's wife and her rosy children. It is an excellent plea for getting a peep at the bonny milk-maids to propose an inspection of a model dairy. You pass through the poultry-yard, under whatever pretence, in reality to see the peacock and his harem. And so on to the very end, the pretended instruction is but in secret the connecting tie which holds together the laughing flowers going off from it to the right and to the left; whilst if ever at intervals this prosy thread of pure didactics is brought forward more obtrusively, it is so by way of foil, to make more effective upon the eye the prodigality of the floral magnificence.

We affirm, therefore, that the didactic poet is so far from seeking even a secondary or remote object in the particular points of information which he may happen to communicate, that much rather he would prefer the having communicated none at all. We will explain ourselves by means of a little illustration from Pope, which

will at the same time furnish us with a miniature type of what we ourselves mean by a didactic poem, both in reference to what it *is* and to what it is *not*. In the *Rape of the Lock* there is a game at cards played, and played with a brilliancy of effect and felicity of selection, applied to the circumstances, which make it a sort of gem within a gem. This game was not in the first edition of the poem, but was an after-thought of Pope's, laboured therefore with more than usual care. We regret that *ombre*, the game described, is no longer played, so that the entire skill with which the mimic battle is fought cannot be so fully appreciated as in Pope's days. The strategics have partly perished, which really Pope ought not to complain of, since he suffers only as Hannibal, Marius, Sertorius, suffered before him. Enough, however, survives of what will tell its own story. For what is it, let us ask, that a poet has to do in such a case, supposing that he were disposed to weave a didactic poem out of a pack of cards, as Vida has out of the chess-board? In describing any particular game he does not seek to *teach* you that game—he postulates it as *already* known to you—but he relies upon separate resources. 1st, He will revive in the reader's eye, for picturesque effect, the well-known personal distinctions of the several kings, knaves, etc., their appearances and their powers. 2dly, He will choose some game in which he may display a happy selection applied to the chances and turns of fortune, to the manœuvres, to the situations of doubt, of brightening expectation, of sudden danger, of critical deliverance, or of final defeat. The interest of a war will be rehearsed—*lis est de paupere regno*—that is true; but the depth of the agitation on such occasions, whether at chess, at draughts, or at cards, is not measured of necessity by the grandeur of the stake; he selects, in short, whatever fascinates the eye or agitates the heart by mimicry of life; but so far from *teaching*, he presupposes the reader already *taught*, in order that he may go along with the movement of the descriptions.

Now, in treating a subject so vast as that which Pope

chose for his Essay, viz., MAN, this eclecticism ceases to be possible. Every part depends upon every other part: in such a *nexus* of truths, to insulate is to annihilate. Severed from each other the parts lose their support, their coherence, their very meaning; you have no liberty to reject or choose. Besides, in treating the ordinary themes proper for what is called didactic poetry—say, for instance, that it were the art of rearing silk-worms or bees—or suppose it to be horticulture, landscape-gardening, hunting, or hawking, rarely does there occur anything polemic; or if a slight controversy *does* arise, it is easily hushed asleep—it is stated in a line, it is answered in a couplet. But in the themes of Lucretius and Pope *everything* is polemic—you move only through dispute, you prosper only by argument and never-ending controversy. There is not positively one capital proposition or doctrine about man, about his origin, his nature, his relations to God, or his prospects, but must be fought for with energy, watched at every turn with vigilance, and followed into endless mazes, not under the choice of the writer, but under the inexorable dictation of the argument.

THE POETRY OF WORDSWORTH

[In his autobiographical sketches De Quincey has himself told the story of that gradual estrangement from Wordsworth which supervened upon a long period of ardent and even extravagant attachment; and in various other passages, written during the poet's lifetime, his personality and his family affairs were discussed with a freedom which Wordsworth deeply and naturally resented. De Quincey's utter lack of reticence and good taste in such matters is strikingly displayed in these amusing and occasionally illuminating, but on the whole inexcusable, revelations. Wordsworth's austere frigidity and his patronizing contempt for his effusive little admirer had deeply wounded a sensitive soul hungry for responsive affection; and De Quincey took a rather ignoble revenge, all the less creditable since it was combined with a distinct recognition that tattle about the private lives of the Lakers made good magazine copy. He had to admit, towards the close of his life, that his friendships with his greater contempor-

aries had ended unhappily. "Put not your trust in the intellectual princes of your age," he sadly advised; "form no connections too close with those who live only in the atmosphere of admiration and praise." But his personal feeling towards Wordsworth did not affect his estimate of the poet's work; and he made some amends for earlier offences by publishing, while Wordsworth still lived, a discriminating but appreciative and justly eulogistic criticism of the whole body of his verse. The essay first appeared in *Tait's Magazine* for September 1845, and was reprinted in vol. vi of the Collective Edition after the Laureate's death, with a severe Note on the "Sybaritish indolence" which caused Wordsworth to leave his doctrine of Poetic Diction in a fragmentary and incomplete condition.]

AMONGST all works that have illustrated our own age, none can more deserve an earnest notice than those of the Laureate; and on some grounds, peculiar to themselves, none so much. Their merit in fact is not only supreme, but unique; not only supreme in their general class, but unique as in a class of their own. And there is a challenge of a separate nature to the curiosity of the readers, in the remarkable contrast between the first stage of Wordsworth's acceptance with the public, and that which he enjoys at present.

One original obstacle to the favourable impression of the Wordsworthian poetry, and an obstacle purely self-created, was his theory of poetic diction. The diction itself, without the theory, was of less consequence; for the mass of readers would have been too blind or too careless to notice it. But the preface to the second edition of his *Poems* (2 vols. 1799-1800) compelled all readers to notice it. Nothing more injudicious was ever done by man. An unpopular truth would, at any rate, have been a bad inauguration for what, on *other* accounts, the author had announced as "an experiment." His poetry was already, and confessedly, an experiment as regarded the quality of the subjects selected, and as regarded the mode of treating them. That was surely trial enough for the reader's untrained sensibilities, without the unpopular novelty besides as to the quality of the diction. But, in the meantime, this novelty, besides being unpopular, was also in part false; it was true, and it was

not true. And it was not true in a double way. Stating broadly, and allowing it to be taken for his meaning, that the diction of ordinary life (in his own words, "the very language of men") was the proper diction for poetry, the writer meant no such thing; for only a *part* of this diction, according to his own subsequent restriction, was available for such a use. And, secondly, as his own subsequent practice showed, even this part was available only for peculiar classes of poetry. In his own exquisite *Laodamia*, in his *Sonnets*, in his *Excursion*, few are his obligations to the idiomatic language of life, as distinguished from that of books, or of prescriptive usage.

Coleridge remarked, justly, that the *Excursion* bristles beyond most poems with what are called "dictionary" words; that is, polysyllabic words of Latin or Greek origin. And so it must ever be, in meditative poetry upon solemn philosophic themes. The gamut of ideas needs a corresponding gamut of expressions; the scale of the thinking, which ranges through *every* key, exacts, for the artist, an unlimited command over the entire scale of the instrument which he employs. Never, in fact, was there a more erroneous direction—one falser in its grounds, or more ruinous in its tendency—than that given by a modern rector¹ of the Glasgow University to the students—viz., that they should cultivate the Saxon part of our language rather than the Latin part. Nonsense. Both are indispensable; and, speaking generally, without stopping to distinguish as to subjects, both are *equally* indispensable. Pathos, in situations which are homely, or at all connected with domestic affections, naturally moves by Saxon words. Lyrical emotion of every kind, which (to merit the name of *lyrical*) must be in the state of flux and reflux, or, generally, of agitation, also requires the Saxon element of our language. And why? Because the Saxon is the aboriginal element; the basis, and not the superstructure; consequently it comprehends all the ideas which are natural to the heart

¹ "Modern rector:"—viz., Lord Brougham.

“One would suppose that in Athens no such thing had been known as sorrow and weeping.” Or Wordsworth himself might say reproachfully to some of Mr. Hazlitt’s more favoured poets: “Judging by *your* themes, a man must believe that there is no such thing on our planet as fighting and kicking.” Wordsworth has written many memorable poems (for instance, *On the Tyrolean and the Spanish Insurrections, On the Retreat from Moscow, On the Feast of Brougham Castle*), all sympathizing powerfully with the martial spirit. Other poets, favourites of Mr. Hazlitt, have never struck a solitary note from this Tyrtæan lyre; and who blames them? Surely, if every man breathing finds his powers limited, every man would do well to respect this silent admonition of nature, by not travelling out of his appointed walk, through any coxcomby of sporting a spurious versatility. And in this view, what Mr. Hazlitt made the reproach of the poet, is amongst the first of his praises. But there is another reason why Wordsworth could not meddle with festal raptures like the glory of a wedding-day. These raptures are not only too brief, but (which is worse) they tend downwards: even for as long as they last, they do not move upon an ascending scale. And even *that* is not their worst fault: they do not diffuse or communicate themselves: the wretches chiefly interested in a marriage are so selfish, that they keep all the rapture to themselves. Mere joy, that does not linger and reproduce itself in reverberations and endless mirrors, is not fitted for poetry. What would the sun be itself, if it were a mere blank orb of fire that did not multiply its splendours through millions of rays refracted and reflected; or if its glory were not endlessly caught, splintered, and thrown back by atmospheric repercussions?

There is, besides, a still subtler reason (and one that ought not to have escaped the acuteness of Mr. Hazlitt) why the muse of Wordsworth could not glorify a wedding festival. Poems no longer than a sonnet he *might* derive from such an impulse: and one such poem of his there really is. But whosoever looks searchingly into the characteristic genius of Wordsworth, will see that he

does not willingly deal with a passion in its direct aspect, or presenting an unmodified contour, but in forms more complex and oblique, and when passing under the shadow of some secondary passion. Joy, for instance, that wells up from constitutional sources, joy that is ebullient from youth to age, and cannot cease to sparkle, he yet exhibits in the person of Matthew,¹ the village school-master, as touched and overgloomed by memories of sorrow. In the poem of *We are Seven*, which brings into day for the first time a profound fact in the abysses of human nature—viz., that the mind of an infant cannot admit the idea of death, cannot comprehend it, any more than the fountain of light can comprehend the aboriginal darkness (a truth on which Mr. Ferrier has since commented beautifully in his *Philosophy of Consciousness*)—the little mountaineer, who furnishes the text for this lovely strain, she whose fulness of life could not brook the gloomy faith in a grave, is yet (for the effect upon the reader) brought into connection with the reflex shadows of the grave: and if she herself has *not*, the reader *has*, and through this very child, the gloom of that contemplation obliquely irradiated, as raised in relief upon his imagination, even by *her*. That same infant, which subjectively could not tolerate death, being by the reader contemplated objectively, flashes upon us the tenderest images of death. Death and its sunny antipole are forced into connection. I remember, again, to have heard a man complain, that in a little poem of Wordsworth's, having for its very subject the universal diffusion (and the gratuitous diffusion) of joy—

Pleasure is spread through the earth,
In stray gifts to be claim'd by whoever shall find,

a picture occurs which overpowered him with melancholy: it was this—

In sight of the spires
All alive with the fires

¹ See the exquisite poems, so little understood by the commonplace reader, of the *Two April Mornings*, and the *Fountain*.

Of the sun going down to his rest,
 In the broad open eye of the solitary sky
 They dance—there are three, as jocund as free,
 While they dance on the calm river's breast.¹

Undeniably there is (and without ground for complaint there is) even here, where the spirit of gaiety is professedly invoked, an oblique though evanescent image flashed upon us of a sadness that lies deep behind the laughing figures, and of a solitude that is the real possessor in fee of all things, but is waiting an hour or so for the dispossession of the dancing men and maidens who for that transitory hour are the true, but, alas! the fugitive tenants.

An inverse case, as regards the three just cited, is found in the poem of *Hart-leap Well*, over which the mysterious spirit of the noonday Pan seems to brood. Out of suffering there is evoked the image of peace. Out of the cruel leap, and the agonizing race through thirteen hours—out of the anguish in the perishing brute, and the headlong courage of his final despair,

Not unobserved by sympathy divine—

out of the ruined lodge and the forgotten mansion, bowers that are trodden under foot, and pleasure-houses that are dust—the poet calls up a vision of *palingenesis* (or restorative resurrection); he interposes his solemn images of suffering, of decay, and ruin, only as a visionary haze through which gleams transpire of a trembling dawn far off, but surely even now on the road.

The pleasure-house is dust: behind, before,
 This is no common waste, no common gloom;

¹ Coleridge had a grievous infirmity of mind as regarded pain. He could not contemplate the shadows of fear, of sorrow, of suffering, with any steadiness of gaze. He was, in relation to that subject, what in Lancashire they call *nesh*—i.e., soft, or effeminate. This frailty claimed indulgence, had he not erected it at times into a ground of superiority. Accordingly, I remember that he also complained of this passage in Wordsworth, and on the same ground, as being too overpoweringly depressing in the fourth line, when modified by the other five.

But Nature in due course of time once more
 Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
 That what we are, and have been, may be known;
 But, at the coming of the milder day,
 These monuments shall all be overgrown.

This influx of the joyous into the sad, and of the sad into the joyous—this reciprocal entanglement of darkness in light, and of light in darkness—offers a subject too occult for popular criticism; but merely to have suggested it, may be sufficient to account for Wordsworth not having chosen a theme of pure garish sunshine, such as the hurry of a wedding-day, so long as others, more picturesque or more plastic to a subtle purpose of creation, were to be had.

* * * * *

It is astonishing how large a harvest of new truths would be reaped, simply through the accident of a man's feeling, or being made to feel, more *deeply* than other men. He sees the same objects, neither more nor fewer, but he sees them engraved in lines far stronger and more determinate; and the difference in the strength makes the whole difference between consciousness and sub-consciousness. And in questions of the mere understanding, we see the same fact illustrated: The author who wins notice the most, is not he that perplexes men by truths drawn from fountains of absolute novelty—truths as yet unsunned, and from that cause obscure; but he that awakens into illuminated consciousness ancient lineaments of truth long slumbering in the mind, although too faint to have extorted attention. Wordsworth has brought many a truth into life both for the eye and for the understanding, which previously had slumbered indistinctly for all men.

For instance, as respects the eye, who does not acknowledge instantaneously the magical strength of truth in his saying of a cataract seen from a station two miles off, that it was "frozen by distance?" In all nature, there is not an object so essentially at war with the

stiffening of frost, as the headlong and desperate life of a cataract; and yet notoriously the effect of distance is to lock up this frenzy of motion into the most petrific column of stillness. This effect is perceived at once when pointed out; but how few are the eyes that ever *would* have perceived it for themselves! Twilight, again—who before Wordsworth ever distinctly noticed its *abstracting* power?—that power of removing, softening, harmonizing, by which a mode of obscurity executes for the eye the same mysterious office which the mind so often, within its own shadowy realms, executes for itself. In the dim interspace between day and night, all disappears from our earthly scenery, as if touched by an enchanter's rod, which is either mean or inharmonious or unquiet, or expressive of temporary things. Leaning against a column of rock, looking down upon a lake or river, and at intervals carrying your eyes forward through a vista of mountains, you become aware that your sight rests upon the very same spectacle, unaltered in a single feature, which once at the same hour was beheld by the legionary Roman from his embattled camp, or by the roving Briton in his "wolf-skin vest," lying down to sleep, and looking

Through some leafy bower,
Before his eyes were closed.

How magnificent is the summary or abstraction of the elementary features in such a scene, as executed by the poet himself, in illustration of this abstraction daily executed by nature, through her handmaid Twilight! Listen, reader, to the closing strain, solemn as twilight is solemn, and grand as the spectacle which it describes:—

By him [*i. e.*, the roving Briton] was seen,
The self-same vision which *we* now behold,
At thy meek bidding, shadowy Power, brought forth,
These mighty barriers, and the gulf between;
The floods, the stars—a spectacle as old
As the beginning of the heavens and earth.

Another great field there is amongst the pomps of

nature, which, if Wordsworth did not first notice, he certainly has noticed most circumstantially. I speak of cloud-scenery, or those pageants of sky-built architecture, which sometimes in summer, at noonday, and in all seasons about sunset, arrest or appal the meditative; "perplexing monarchs" with the spectacle of armies manœuvring, or deepening the solemnity of evening by towering edifices, that mimic—but which also in mimicking mock—the transitory grandeurs of man. It is singular that these gorgeous phenomena, not less than those of the *Aurora Borealis*, have been so little noticed by poets. The *Aurora* was naturally neglected by the southern poets of Greece and Rome, as not much seen in their latitudes.¹ But the cloud-architecture of the daylight belongs alike to north and south. Accordingly, I remember one notice of it in Hesiod, a case where the clouds exhibited

The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest.

Another there is, a thousand years later, in Lucan: amongst the portents which that poet notices as prefiguring the dreadful convulsions destined to shake the earth at Pharsalia, I remember some fiery coruscation of arms in the heavens; but, so far as I recollect, the appearances might have belonged equally to the workmanship of the clouds or the *Aurora*. Up and down the next eight hundred years, are scattered evanescent allusions to these vapoury appearances; in *Hamlet* and else-

¹ But then, says the reader, why was it not proportionably the more noticed by poets of the north? Certainly that question is fair. And the answer, it is scarcely possible to doubt, is this:—That until the rise of Natural Philosophy, in Charles II's reign, *there was no name* for the appearance; on which account, some writers have been absurd enough to believe that the *Aurora* did not exist, noticeably, until about 1690. Shakspeare, in his journeys down to Stratford (always performed on horseback), must often have been belated: he must sometimes have seen, he could not but have admired, the fiery skirmishing of the *Aurora*. And yet, for want of a word to fix and identify the gorgeous phenomenon, how could he introduce it as an image, or even as the subject of an allusion in his writings?

where occur gleams of such allusions; but I remember no distinct sketch of such an appearance before that in the *Antony and Cleopatra* of Shakspeare, beginning,

Sometimes we see a cloud that 's dragonish.

Subsequently to Shakspeare, these notices, as of all phenomena whatsoever that demanded a familiarity with nature in the spirit of love, became rarer and rarer. At length, as the eighteenth century was winding up its accounts, forth stepped William Wordsworth, of whom, as a reader of all pages in nature, it may be said that, if we except Dampier, the admirable buccaneer, the gentle *fibustier*, and some few professional naturalists, he first and he last looked at natural objects with the eye that neither will be dazzled from without nor cheated by pre-conceptions from within. Most men look at nature in the hurry of a confusion that distinguishes nothing; *their* error is from without. Pope, again, and many who live in towns, make such blunders as that of supposing the moon to tip with silver the hills *behind* which she is rising, not by erroneous use of their eyes (for they use them not at all), but by inveterate preconceptions. Scarcely has there been a poet with what could be called a learned eye, or an eye *extensively* learned, before Wordsworth. Much affectation there has been of that sort since *his* rise, and at all times much counterfeit enthusiasm; but the sum of the matter is this, that Wordsworth had his passion for nature fixed in his blood; it was a necessity, like that of the mulberry-leaf to the silk-worm; and through his commerce with nature did he live and breathe

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A volume might be filled with such glimpses of novelty as Wordsworth has first laid bare, even to the apprehension of the *senses*. For the *understanding*, when moving in the same track of human sensibilities, he has done only not so much. How often (to give an instance or two) must the human heart have felt the case, and yearned for an expression of the case, when there are sorrows

which descend far below the region in which tears gather; and yet who has ever given utterance to this feeling until Wordsworth came with his immortal line:—

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears?

This sentiment, and others that might be adduced (such as “The child is father of the man”), have even passed into the popular heart, and are often quoted by those who know not *whom* they are quoting. Magnificent, again, is the sentiment, and yet an echo to one which lurks amongst all hearts, in relation to the frailty of merely human schemes for working good, which so often droop and collapse through the unsteadiness of human energies—

Foundations must be laid
In heaven.

How? Foundations laid in realms that are *above*? But *that* is impossible; *that* is at war with elementary physics; foundations must be laid *below*. Yes; and even so the poet throws the mind yet more forcibly on the hyperphysical character—on the grandeur transcending all physics—of those spiritual and shadowy foundations which alone are enduring.

But the great distinction of Wordsworth, and the pledge of his increasing popularity, is the extent of his sympathy with what is *really* permanent in human feelings, and also the depth of this sympathy. Young and Cowper, the two earlier leaders in the province of meditative poetry, are too circumscribed in the range of their sympathies, too narrow, too illiberal, and too exclusive. Both these poets manifested the quality of their strength in the quality of their public reception. Popular in some degree from the first, they entered upon the inheritance of their fame almost at once. Far different was the fate of Wordsworth; for in poetry of this class, which appeals to what lies deepest in man, in proportion to the native power of the poet, and his fitness for permanent life, is the strength of resistance in the public taste. Whatever is too original will be hated at the first. It must slowly

mould a public for itself; and the resistance of the early thoughtless judgments must be overcome by a counter resistance to itself, in a better audience slowly mustering against the first. Forty and seven years it is since William Wordsworth first appeared as an author. Twenty of those years he was the scoff of the world, and his poetry a by-word of scorn. Since then, and more than once, senates have rung with acclamations to the echo of his name. Now at this moment, whilst we are talking about him, he has entered upon his seventy-sixth year. For himself, according to the course of nature, he cannot be far from his setting; but his poetry is only now clearing the clouds that gathered about its rising. Meditative poetry is perhaps that province of literature which will ultimately maintain most power amongst the generations which are coming; but in this department, at least, there is little competition to be apprehended by Wordsworth from anything that has appeared since the death of Shakspeare.

COLERIDGE

[De Quincey's relations with Coleridge underwent a change similar to that which obscured his intercourse with Wordsworth. He began with an almost idolatrous devotion, bestowed assiduous attention upon the philosopher, helped him with his literary work and his personal affairs, and gave him a considerable sum of money. Coleridge showed no gratitude, and affected towards his admirer a scornful indifference which veiled a certain jealousy of the rival expert in opium and metaphysics. This treatment De Quincey repaid with a much more active dislike than he ever exhibited for Wordsworth. His reverence for Coleridge's genius was mingled with a certain contempt for his indolence, his dilatoriness, his pretentiousness, and his vague, ill-organized, ill-digested learning. There was jealousy on both sides; for De Quincey, who had read as much as Coleridge, believed that he was a clearer thinker, and could carry his burden without losing himself in quagmires of misty speculation. But no student of Coleridge (if any such are left upon this earth) can neglect De Quincey's numerous ill-natured but acute, humorous, and often extraordinarily informing, pages upon the philosopher and the man. De Quincey went near to Boswellizing Coleridge; he has transmitted to us a good deal

of the vitality which his own age found in that great strange figure, that creature of infinite possibilities who made so little of a splendid natural endowment. The following extracts are taken from the essay on *Coleridge and Opium-Eating*, originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine* for January 1845, as a review of Gillman's *Life of Coleridge*.]

HE was, in a literary sense, our brother; for he also was amongst the contributors to *Blackwood*, and will, we presume, take his station in that Blackwood gallery of portraits which in a century hence will possess more interest for intellectual Europe than any merely martial series of portraits, or any gallery of statesmen assembled in congress, except as regards one or two leaders; for defunct major-generals and secondary diplomatists, when their date is passed, awake no more emotion than last year's advertisements or obsolete directories; whereas those who in a stormy age have swept the harps of passion, of genial wit, or of the wrestling and gladiatorial reason, become more interesting to men when they can no longer be seen as bodily agents than even in the middle chorus of that intellectual music over which, living, they presided.

Of this great camp Coleridge was a leader, and fought among the *primipili*; yet comparatively he is still unknown. Heavy, indeed, are the arrears still due to philosophic curiosity on the real merits and on the separate merits of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge as a poet, Coleridge as a philosopher,—how extensive are those two questions, if those were all! And upon neither question have we yet any investigation, such as, by compass of views, by research, or even by earnestness of sympathy with the subject, can or ought to satisfy a philosophic demand. Blind is that man who can persuade himself that the interest in Coleridge, taken as a total object, is becoming an obsolete interest. We are of opinion that even Milton, now viewed from a distance of two centuries, is still inadequately judged or appreciated in his character of poet, of patriot, and partisan, or, finally, in his character of accomplished scholar. But if so, how much less can it be pretended

that satisfaction has been rendered to the claims of Coleridge! for upon Milton libraries have been written. There has been time for the malice of men, for the jealousy of men, for the enthusiasm, the scepticism, the adoring admiration of men to expand themselves. There has been room for a "slashing Bentley with his desperate hook," for an Addison, for a Johnson, for a wicked Lauder, for an avenging Douglas, for an idolizing Chateaubriand, for a wild insulting infidel Curran; and yet, after all, little enough has been done towards any comprehensive estimate of the mighty being concerned. Piles of materials have been gathered to the ground; but, for the monument which should have risen from these materials, neither the first stone has been laid nor has a qualified architect yet presented his credentials. On the other hand, upon Coleridge little comparatively has yet been written; whilst the separate characters on which the judgment is awaited are more by one than those which Milton sustained. Coleridge also is a poet. Coleridge also was mixed up with the fervent politics of his age—an age how memorably reflecting the revolutionary agitations of Milton's age! Coleridge also was an extensive and brilliant scholar. Whatever might be the separate proportions of the two men in each particular department of the three here noticed, think as the reader will upon that point, sure we are that either subject is ample enough to make a strain upon the amplest faculties. How alarming, therefore, for any *honest* critic, who should undertake this later subject of Coleridge, to recollect that, after pursuing him through a zodiac of splendours corresponding to those of Milton in kind, however different in degree,—after weighing him as a poet, as a philosophic politician, as a scholar,—he will have to wheel after him into another orbit—into the unfathomable *nimbus* of transcendental metaphysics! Weigh him the critic must in the golden balance of philosophy the most abstruse—a balance which even itself requires weighing previously—or he will have done nothing that can be received for an estimate of the composite Coleridge. This astonishing

man, be it again remembered, besides being an exquisite poet, a profound political speculator, a philosophic student of literature through all its chambers and recesses, was also a circumnavigator on the most pathless waters of scholasticism and metaphysics. He had sounded, without guiding-charts, the secret deeps of Proclus and Plotinus; he had laid down buoys on the twilight or moonlight ocean of Jacob Boehmen;¹ he had cruised over the broad Atlantic of Kant and Schelling, of Fitch and Oken. Where is the man who shall be equal to these things?

COLERIDGE AS A CONVERSATIONALIST

There is another accomplishment of Coleridge's, less broadly open to the judgment of this generation, and not at all of the next—viz., his splendid art of conversation, on which it will be interesting to say a word. Ten years ago, when the music of this rare performance had not yet ceased to vibrate in men's ears, what a sensation was gathering amongst the educated classes on this particular subject! What a tumult of anxiety prevailed to "hear Mr. Coleridge," or even to talk with a man who *had* heard him. Had he lived till this day, not Paganini would have been so much sought after. That sensation is now decaying, because a new generation has emerged during the ten years since his death. But many still remain whose sympathy (whether of curiosity in those who did *not* know him or of admiration in those who *did*) still reflects as in a mirror the great stir upon this subject which then was moving in the world. To these, if they should inquire for the great distinguishing principle of Coleridge's conversation, we might say that it was the

¹ "*Jacob Boehmen*:"—We ourselves had the honour of presenting to Mr. Coleridge Law's English version of Jacob—a set of huge quartos. Some months afterwards we saw this work lying open, and one volume, at least, overflowing, in parts, with the commentaries and the *corollaries* of Coleridge. Whither has this work, and so many others swathed about with Coleridge's manuscript notes, vanished from the world?

power of vast combination. He gathered into focal concentration the largest body of objects, *apparently* disconnected, that any man ever yet, by any magic, could assemble, or, *having* assembled, could manage. His great fault was, that, by not opening sufficient spaces for reply, or suggestion, or collateral notice, he not only narrowed his own field, but he grievously injured the final impression. For when men's minds are purely passive, when they are not allowed to react, then it is that they collapse most, and that their sense of what is said must ever be feeblest. Doubtless there must have been great conversational masters elsewhere, and at many periods; but in this lay Coleridge's characteristic advantage, that he was a great natural power, and also a great artist. He was a power in the art; and he carried a new art into the power.

COLERIDGE AND OPIUM

Let us ask of any man who holds that not Coleridge himself, but the world, as interested in Coleridge's usefulness, has suffered by his addiction to opium, whether he is aware of the way in which opium affected Coleridge; and, secondly, whether he is aware of the actual contributions to literature—how large they were—which Coleridge made *in spite* of opium. All who were intimate with Coleridge must remember the fits of genial animation which were created continually in his manner and in his buoyancy of thought by a recent or by an *extra* dose of the omnipotent drug. A lady, who knew nothing experimentally of opium, once startled us by saying that she "could tell to a certainty when Mr. Coleridge had taken too much opium by his shining countenance." She was right, and we knew it; but thought the secret within narrow keeping: we knew that mark of opium excesses well, and the cause of it; or at least we believe the cause to lie in the quickening of the insensible perspiration which accumulates and glistens on the face. Be that as it may, a criterion it was that could not deceive us as to the condition of Coleridge. And uniformly in that condition he made his most effective intellectual displays.

It is true that he might not be happy under this fiery animation; and we fully believe that he was not. Nobody is happy except for a very short term of years under an artificial stimulation. But in what way did that operate upon his exertions as a writer? We are of opinion that it killed Coleridge as a poet. "The Harp of Quantock"¹ was silenced for ever by the torment of opium; but proportionably it roused and stung by misery his metaphysical instincts into more spasmodic life. Poetry can flourish only in the atmosphere of happiness. But subtle and perplexed investigations of difficult problems are amongst the commonest resources for beguiling the sense of misery.

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It is urged, however, that, even on his philosophic speculations, opium operated unfavourably in one respect, by often causing him to leave them unfinished. This is true. Whenever Coleridge (being highly charged, or saturated, with opium) had written with distempered vigour upon any question, there occurred soon after a recoil of intense disgust, not from his own paper only, but even from the entire subject. All opium-eaters are tainted with the infirmity of leaving works unfinished, and suffering reactions of disgust; but Coleridge taxed himself with that infirmity in verse before he could at all have commenced opium-eating. Besides, it is too much assumed by Coleridge and by his biographer, that to leave off opium was of course to regain juvenile health. Indeed all opium-eaters, or indulgers in alcohol, make the mistake of supposing every pain or irritation which they suffer to be the product of the stimulant used, whereas a wise man will say, Suppose you *do* leave off

¹ *The Harp of Quantock*:—Under that designation it was that Wordsworth had apostrophized Coleridge as a poet after long years of silence. The *Quantock Hills*, in southern Somersetshire, are alluded to in Wordsworth's exquisite poem of *Ruth*; and were the early scene of joint wanderings on the part of the two poets, when Wordsworth and his sister tenanted Alfoxton, during the minority of Mr. St. Aubyn.

opium, that will not deliver you from the load of years (say sixty-three) which you carry on your back. Charles Lamb, another man of true genius, and another head belonging to the Blackwood gallery, made that mistake in his *Confessions of a Drunkard*. "I looked back," says he, "to the time when always, on waking in the morning, I had a song rising to my lips." At present, it seems, being a drunkard, he has no such song. Aye, dear Lamb, but note this, that the drunkard was fifty-six years old, while the songster was twenty-three. Take twenty-three from fifty-six, and we have heard it said that thirty-three will remain: at least Cocker, who was a very obstinate man, went to his grave in that persuasion. But that extra burthen of thirty-three years is a pretty good reason for not singing in the morning, even if brandy has been out of the question.

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For our part, we are slow to believe that ever any man did or could learn the somewhat awful truth, that in a certain ruby-coloured elixir there lurked a divine power to chase away the genius of pain, or secondly, of *ennui* (which it is, far more than pain, that saddens our human life), without sometimes, and to some extent, abusing this power. To taste but once from the tree of knowledge is fatal to the subsequent power of abstinence. True it is that generations have used laudanum as an anodyne (for instance, hospital patients), who have not afterwards courted its powers as a voluptuous stimulant; but that, be sure, has arisen from no abstinence in *them*. There are, in fact, two classes of temperaments as to this terrific drug—those which are, and those which are not preconformed to its power; those which genially expand to its temptations, and those which frostily exclude them. Not in the energies of the will, but in the qualities of the nervous organization, lies the dread arbitration of—Fall or stand: doomed thou art to yield, or strengthened constitutionally to resist. Most of those who have but a low sense of the spells lying couchant in opium have practically none at all; for the initial fascination is

for *them* effectually defeated by the sickness which nature has associated with the first stages of opium-eating. But to that other class, whose nervous sensibilities vibrate to their profoundest depths under the first touch of the angelic poison, even as a lover's ear thrills on hearing unexpectedly the voice of her whom he loves, opium is the Amreeta cup of beatitude. You know the *Paradise Lost*? and you remember from the eleventh book, in its earlier part, that laudanum must already have existed in Eden—nay, that it was used medicinally by an archangel: for, after Michael had “purged with euphrasy and rue” the eyes of Adam, lest he should be unequal to the mere *sight* of the great visions about to unfold their draperies before him, next he fortifies his fleshly spirits against the *affliction* of these visions, of which visions the first was death. And how?

He from the well of life three drops instilled.

What was their operation?

So deep the power of these ingredients pierced,
Even to the inmost seat of mental sight,
 That Adam, now enforced to close his eyes,
 Sank down, and all his spirits became entranced.
 But him the gentle angel by the hand
 Soon raised——

The second of these lines it is which betrays the presence of laudanum. It is in the faculty of mental vision—it is in the increased power of dealing with the shadowy and the dark, that the characteristic virtue of opium lies. Now, in the original higher sensibility is found some palliation for the *practice* of opium-eating; in the greater temptation lies a greater excuse.

CHARLES LAMB

[If some of De Quincey's literary friendships were unfortunate, his relations with Charles Lamb were entirely happy. Many beautiful and tender sentences have been written on the most lovable of English men of letters, but none more beautiful and tender than those of De Quincey. I do not think he was ever among Lamb's closest friends; but they saw a good deal of one another during De Quincey's first period of London residence, when he was cultivating literary society with diligence, and they met from time to time when De Quincey came up to town from Grasmere. Ill-natured critics have charged him with making too much of his intimacy with Lamb for journalistic purposes. But I do not see how any one can read the pages that follow without being convinced that "Saint Charles" had touched those springs of emotion in De Quincey which were deep and pure, even if they sometimes bubbled too easily to the surface. For him hardness, callousness, insensibility, were the capital crimes in literature and in life; and he loved Lamb, as many other good men have loved him, because he found in him the embodied negation of those qualities.

The first two extracts given below are from De Quincey's review of Talfourd's *Final Memorials of Charles Lamb* in the *North British Review* for November 1848. The third appeared ten years earlier—four years after Lamb's death—in one of the "Opium-eater" series contributed to *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. It appears in the number for April 1838, under the sub-heading "Recollections of Charles Lamb."]

THE LIFE'S TRAGEDY

To appreciate Lamb it is requisite that his character and temperament should be understood in their coyest and most wayward features. A capital defect it would be if these could not be gathered silently from Lamb's works themselves. It would be a fatal mode of dependency upon an alien and separable accident if they needed an external commentary. But they do *not*. The syllables lurk up and down the writings of Lamb which decipher his eccentric nature. His character lies there dispersed in anagram; and to any attentive reader the regathering and restoration of the total word from its scattered parts is inevitable without an effort. Still it is always a satisfaction in knowing a result, to know also

its *why* and *how*; and in so far as every character is likely to be modified by the particular experience, sad or joyous, through which the life has travelled, it is a good contribution towards the knowledge of that resulting character as a whole to have a sketch of that particular experience. What trials did it impose? What energies did it task? What temptations did it unfold? These calls upon the moral powers, which in music so stormy, many a life is doomed to hear, how were they faced? The character in a capital degree moulds oftentimes the life, but the life *always* in a subordinate degree moulds the character. And the character being in this case of Lamb so much of a key to the writings, it becomes important that the life should be traced, however briefly, as a key to the character.

That is *one* reason for detaining the reader with some slight record of Lamb's career. Such a record by preference and of right belongs to a case where the intellectual display, which is the sole ground of any public interest at all in the man, has been intensely modified by the *humanities* and moral *personalities* distinguishing the subject. We read a *Physiology*, and need no information as to the life and conversation of its author; a meditative poem becomes far better understood by the light of such information; but a work of genial and at the same time eccentric sentiment, wandering upon untrodden paths, is barely intelligible without it. There is a good reason for arresting judgment on the writer, that the court may receive evidence on the life of the man. But there is another reason, and, in any other place, a better; which reason lies in the extraordinary value of the life considered separately for itself. Logically, it is not allowable to say that *here*; and, considering the principal purpose of this paper, any possible *independent* value of the life must rank as a better reason for reporting it. Since, in a case where the original object is professedly to estimate the writings of a man, whatever promises to further that object must, merely by that tendency, have, in relation to that place, a momentary advantage which it would lose if valued upon a more abstract

scale. Liberated from this casual office of throwing light upon a book—raised to its grander station of a solemn deposition to the moral capacities of man in conflict with calamity—viewed as a return made into the chanceries of heaven—upon an issue directed from that court to try the amount of power lodged in a poor desolate pair of human creatures for facing the very anarchy of storms—this obscure life of the two Lambs, brother and sister (for the two lives were one life), rises into a grandeur that is not paralleled once in a generation.

Rich, indeed, in moral instruction was the life of Charles Lamb; and perhaps in one chief result it offers to the thoughtful observer a lesson of consolation that is awful, and of hope that ought to be immortal, viz., in the record which it furnishes, that by meekness of submission, and by earnest conflict with evil, in the spirit of cheerfulness, it is possible ultimately to disarm or to blunt the very heaviest of curses—even the curse of lunacy. Had it been whispered, in hours of infancy, to Lamb, by the angel who stood by his cradle—"Thou, and the sister that walks by ten years before thee, shall be through life, each to each, the solitary fountain of comfort; and except it be from this fountain of mutual love, except it be as brother and sister, ye shall not taste the cup of peace on earth!"—here, if there was sorrow in reversion, there was also consolation.

But what funeral swamps would have instantly engulfed this consolation, had some meddling fiend prolonged the revelation, and, holding up the curtain from the sad future a little longer, had said scornfully—"Peace on earth! Peace for you two, Charles and Mary Lamb! What peace is possible under the curse which even now is gathering against your heads? Is there peace on earth for the lunatic—peace for the parenticide—peace for the girl that, without warning, and without time granted for a penitential cry to Heaven, sends her mother to the last audit?" And then, without treachery, speaking bare truth, this prophet of woe might have added—"Thou also, thyself, Charles Lamb, thou in thy proper person, shalt enter the skirts of this dreadful hail-storm;

even thou shalt taste the secrets of lunacy, and enter as a captive its house of bondage;¹ whilst over thy sister the accursed scorpion shall hang suspended through life, like Death hanging over the beds of hospitals, striking at times, but more often threatening to strike; or withdrawing its instant menaces only to lay bare her mind more bitterly to the persecutions of a haunted memory!" Considering the nature of the calamity, in the first place; considering, in the second place, its life-long duration; and, in the last place, considering the quality of the resistance by which it was met, and under what circumstances of humble resources in money or friends—we have come to the deliberate judgment, that the whole range of history scarcely presents a more affecting spectacle of perpetual sorrow, humiliation, or conflict, and that was supported to the end (that is, through forty years) with more resignation, or with more absolute victory.

THE PERSONALITY OF LAMB

Somewhere about 1810 and 1812 I must have met Lamb repeatedly at the *Courier Office* in the Strand; that is, at Coleridge's, to whom, as an intimate friend, Mr. Daniel Stewart (a proprietor of the paper) gave up for a time the use of some rooms in the office. Thither, in the London season (May especially and June), resorted Lamb, Godwin, Sir H. Davy, and, once or twice, Wordsworth, who visited Sir George Beaumont's Leicestershire residence of Coleorton early in the spring, and then travelled up to Grosvenor Square with Sir George and Lady Beaumont; "*spectatum veniens, veniens spectetur ut ipse.*"

But in these miscellaneous gatherings, Lamb said little, except when an opening arose for a pun. And how effectual that sort of small shot was from *him*, I need not say to anybody who remembers his infirmity of

¹ Lamb was himself confined for six weeks at one period of his life in a lunatic asylum.

stammering, and his dexterous management of it for purposes of light and shade. He was often able to train the roll of stammers into settling upon the words immediately preceding the effective one; by which means the key-note of the jest or sarcasm, benefiting by the sudden liberation of his embargoed voice, was delivered with the force of a pistol shot. That stammer was worth an annuity to him as an ally of his wit. Firing under cover of that advantage, he did triple execution; for, in the first place, the distressing sympathy of the hearers with *his* distress of utterance won for him unavoidably the silence of deep attention; and then, whilst he had us all hoaxed into this attitude of mute suspense by an appearance of distress that he perhaps did not really feel, down came a plunging shot into the very thick of us, with ten times the effect it would else have had.

Since the rencontres with Lamb at Coleridge's, I had met him once or twice at literary dinner-parties. One of these occurred at the house of Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, the publishers. I myself was suffering too much from illness at the time to take any pleasure in what passed, or to notice it with any vigilance of attention. Lamb, I remember, as usual, was full of gaiety; and as usual he rose too rapidly to the zenith of his gaiety; for he shot upwards like a rocket, and, as usual, people said he was "tipsy." To me, Lamb never seemed intoxicated, but at most joyously elevated. He never talked nonsense, which is a great point gained: nor polemically, which is a greater; for it is a dreadful thing to find a drunken man bent upon converting one's-self: nor sentimentally, which is greatest of all. You can stand a man's fraternizing with you; or, if he swears an eternal friendship, only once in an hour, you do not think of calling the police; but once in every three minutes is too much. Lamb did none of these things; he was always rational, quiet, and gentlemanly in his habits.

* * * * *

In regard to wine, Lamb and myself had the same habit—perhaps it rose to the dignity of a principle—viz.,

to take a great deal *during* dinner—none *after* it. Consequently, as Miss Lamb (who drank only water) retired almost with the dinner itself, nothing remained for men of our principles, the rigour of which we had illustrated by taking rather too much of old port before the cloth was drawn, except talking; amœbæan colloquy, or, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, a dialogue of "brisk reciprocation." But this was impossible; over Lamb, at this period of his life, there passed regularly, after taking wine, a brief eclipse of sleep. It descended upon him as softly as a shadow. In a gross person, laden with superfluous flesh, and sleeping heavily, this would have been disagreeable; but in Lamb, thin even to meagreness, spare and wiry as an Arab of the desert, or as Thomas Aquinas, wasted by scholastic vigils, the affection of sleep seemed rather a network of aërial gossamer than of earthly cobweb—more like a golden haze falling upon him gently from the heavens than a cloud exhaling upwards from the flesh. Motionless in his chair as a bust, breathing so gently as scarcely to seem certainly alive, he presented the image of repose midway between life and death, like the repose of sculpture; and to one who knew his history, a repose affectingly contrasting with the calamities and internal storms of his life. I have heard more persons than I can now distinctly recall, observe of Lamb when sleeping, that his countenance in that state assumed an expression almost seraphic, from its intellectual beauty of outline, its child-like simplicity, and its benignity. It could not be called a transfiguration that sleep had worked in his face; for the features wore essentially the same expression when waking; but sleep spiritualized that expression, exalted it, and also harmonized it. Much of the change lay in that last process. The eyes it was that disturbed the unity of effect in Lamb's waking face. They gave a restlessness to the character of his intellect, shifting, like northern lights, through every mode of combination with fantastic playfulness, and sometimes by fiery gleams obliterating for the moment that pure light of benignity which was the predominant reading on his features.

Well and truly, therefore, did the poet say, in his beautiful lines upon this man's grave and memory¹—

Oh, he was good, if e'er a good man lived!

HAZLITT

[This brilliant fragment on Hazlitt is a purple patch sewn into the essay on Lamb in the *North British Review*—the excuse being that Hazlitt had evoked the “extravagant admiration” of Lamb, and had been called by Lamb's biographer, Sergeant Talfourd, “a great thinker.”]

UNACQUAINTED with Grecian philosophy, with Scholastic philosophy, and with the recomposition of these philosophies in the looms of Germany during the last seventy and odd years, trusting merely to the untrained instincts of keen mother-wit—whence should Hazlitt have had the materials for great thinking? It is through the collation of many abortive voyages to polar regions that a man gains his first chance of entering the polar basin, or of running ahead on the true line of approach to it. The very reason for Hazlitt's defect in eloquence as a lecturer, is sufficient also as a reason why he could not have been a comprehensive thinker. “He was not eloquent,” says the Sergeant, “in the true sense of the term.” But why? Because it seems “his thoughts were too weighty to be moved along by the shallow stream of feeling which an evening's excitement can rouse,”—an explanation which leaves us in doubt whether Hazlitt forfeited his chance of eloquence by accommodating himself to this evening's excitement, or by gloomily resisting it. Our own explanation is different, Hazlitt was not eloquent, because he was discontinuous. No man can be eloquent whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and (to borrow an impressive word from Coleridge) non-sequacious. Eloquence resides not in separate or fractional ideas, but in the relations of manifold ideas, and in the mode

¹ Wordsworth, in his poem of 1835, entitled *Written after the Death of Charles Lamb*.

of their evolution from each other. It is not indeed enough that the ideas should be many, and their relations coherent; the main condition lies in the *key* of the evolution, in the *law* of the succession. The elements are nothing without the atmosphere that moulds, and the dynamic forces that combine. Now Hazlitt's brilliancy is seen chiefly in separate splinterings of phrase or image which throw upon the eye a vitreous scintillation for a moment, but spread no deep suffusions of colour, and distribute no masses of mighty shadow. A flash, a solitary flash, and all is gone. Rhetoric, according to its quality, stands in many degrees of relation to the permanencies of truth; and all rhetoric, like all flesh, is partly unreal, and the glory of both is fleeting. Even the mighty rhetoric of Sir Thomas Browne, or Jeremy Taylor, to whom only it has been granted to open the trumpet-stop on that great organ of passion, oftentimes leaves behind it the sense of sadness which belongs to beautiful apparitions starting out of darkness upon the morbid eye, only to be reclaimed by darkness in the instant of their birth, or which belongs to pageantries in the clouds. But if all rhetoric is a mode of pyrotechny, and all pyrotechnics are by necessity fugitive, yet even in these frail pomps, there are many degrees of frailty. Some fireworks require an hour's duration for the expansion of their glory; others, as if formed from fulminating powder, expire in the very act of birth. Precisely on that scale of duration and of power stand the glitterings of rhetoric that are not worked into the texture, but washed on from the outside. Hazlitt's thoughts were of the same fractured and discontinuous order as his illustrative images—seldom or never self-diffusive; and *that* is a sufficient argument that he had never cultivated philosophic thinking.

LUCRETIUS AND HORACE

[This comparison between a poet whose literary art De Quincey admired and a poet whose principles he detested—for he is always apt to lose his temper with materialist and anti-religious writers—is in the Essay on John Keats, which was one of the Notes on Gillilan's *Literary Portraits*, contributed to *Tait's Magazine* in 1845 and 1846, and republished in vol. vi of the Collective Edition.]

THE *curiosa felicitas* of Horace in his lyric compositions, the elaborate delicacy of workmanship in his thoughts and in his style, argue a scale of labour that, as against any equal number of lines in Lucretius, would measure itself by months against days. There are single odes in Horace that must have cost him a six weeks' seclusion from the wickedness of Rome. Do I then question the extraordinary power of Lucretius? On the contrary, I admire him as the first of demoniacs. The frenzy of an earth-born or a hell-born inspiration; divinity of stormy music sweeping round us in eddies, in order to prove that for us there could be nothing divine; the grandeur of a prophet's voice rising in angry gusts, by way of convincing us that all prophets were swindlers; oracular scorn of oracles; frantic efforts, such as might seem reasonable in one who was scaling the heavens, for the purpose of degrading all things, making man to be the most abject of necessities as regarded his origin, to be the blindest of accidents as regarded his expectations; these fierce antinomies expose a mode of insanity, but of an insanity affecting a sublime intellect.¹ And most

¹ There is one peculiarity about Lucretius which, even in the absence of all anecdotes to that effect, would have led an observing reader to suspect some unsoundness in his brain. It is this, and it lies in his manner. In all poetic enthusiasm, however grand and sweeping may be its compass, so long as it is healthy and natural, there is a principle of self-restoration in the opposite direction; there is a counter state of repose, a compensatory state, as in the tides of the sea, which tends continually to re-establish the equipoise. The lull is no less intense than the fury of commotion. But in Lucretius there is no lull. Nor would there *seem* to be any, were it not for two accidents—first, the occasional pause in his

people who read Lucretius at all, are aware of the traditional story current in Rome, that he did actually write in a delirious state; not under any figurative disturbance of brain, but under a real physical disturbance from philtres administered to him by some enamoured woman. But this kind of morbid *afflatus* did not deliver itself into words and metre by lingering oscillations, and through processes of stealthy growth: it threw itself forward, and precipitated its own utterance, with the headlong movement of a cataract. It was an *oestrum*, a rapture, the bounding of a moenad, by which the muse of Lucretius lived and moved. So much is known by the impression about him current among his contemporaries; so much is evident in the characteristic manner of his poem, if all anecdotes had perished. And, upon the whole, let the proportions of power between Horace and Lucretius be what they may, the proportions of labour are absolutely incommensurable: in Horace the labour was *directly* as the power, in Lucretius *inversely* as the power. Whatsoever in Horace was best, had been obtained by *most* labour; whatsoever in Lucretius was best, by *least*. In Horace, the exquisite skill co-operated with the exquisite nature; in Lucretius, the powerful nature disdained the skill, which, indeed, would not have been applicable to *his* theme, or to *his* treatment of it, and triumphed through mere precipitation of volume, and headlong fury.

raving tone enforced by the interruption of an episode; secondly, the restraints (or at least the suspensions) imposed upon him by the difficulties of *argument conducted in verse*. To dispute metrically, is as embarrassing as to run or dance when knee-deep in sand. Else, and apart from these counteractions, the motion of the style is not only stormy, but self-kindling, and continually accelerated.

JEAN PAUL RICHTER

[De Quincey might—and did—claim the credit of first making Jean Paul as well as Lessing known to English readers. He was an admiring and enthusiastic student of Richter, whose style and literary manner largely influenced his own. Carlyle, a learner in the same school, paid his more emphatic and better-known tribute to the great German master of humour and pathos later than De Quincey, whose article on John Paul Frederick Richter appeared in the *London Magazine* for December 1821, and was his first contribution to that publication after the *Confessions*. It was introduced by a very apposite quotation from Trebellius Pollio referring to “virum, ex hodiernis transrhenanis, quem ego præ cæteris stupeo, et qui locum principis in litteris Germanicis meretur jure.” This was De Quincey’s opinion. Jean Paul held a place in his affections and in his critical estimation above that of all his German contemporaries.]

IN point of originality there cannot arise a question between the pretensions of Richter and those of any other German author whatsoever. He is no man’s representative but his own; nor do I think he will ever have a successor. Of *his* style of writing, it may be said, with an emphatic and almost exclusive propriety, that except it proceeds in a spirit of perfect freedom, it cannot exist; unless moving from an impulse self-derived, it cannot move at all. What then *is* his style of writing? What are its general characteristics? These I will endeavour to describe with sufficient circumstantiality to meet your present wants: premising only that I call him frequently *John Paul*, without adding his surname, both because all Germany gives him that appellation as an expression of affection for his person, and because he has himself sometimes assumed it in the title-pages of his works.

The characteristic distinction of Paul Richter amongst German authors, I will venture to add amongst modern authors generally, is the two-headed power which he possesses over the pathetic and the humorous; or, rather, let me say at once, what I have often felt to be true, and could (I think) at a fitting opportunity prove to be so,

this power is *not* two-headed, but a one-headed Janus with two faces: the pathetic and the humorous are but different phases of the same orb; they assist each other, melt indiscernibly into each other, and often shine each through each like layers of coloured crystals placed one behind another. Take, as an illustration, Mrs. Quickly's account of Falstaff's death. Here there were three things to be accomplished: first, the death of a human being was to be described; of necessity, therefore, to be described pathetically; for death being one of those events which call up the pure generalities of human nature, and remove to the background all individualities, whether of life or character, the mind would not in any case endure to have it treated with levity; so that, if any circumstances of humour are introduced by the poetic painter, they must be such as will blend and fall into harmony with the ruling passion of the scene: and, by the way, combining it with the fact, that humorous circumstances often *have* been introduced into death-bed scenes, both actual and imaginary,—this remark of itself yields a proof that there *is* a humour which is in alliance with pathos. How else could we have borne the jests of Sir Thomas More after his condemnation, which, *as* jests, would have been unseasonable from anybody else: but being felt in him to have a root in his character, they take the dignity of humorous traits; and do, in fact, deepen the pathos. So again, mere *naïveté*, or archness, when it is felt to flow out of the cheerfulness of resignation, becomes humorous, and at the same time becomes pathetic: as, for instance, Lady Jane Grey's remark on the scaffold—"I have but a little neck," etc.

But to return: the death of Falstaff, as the death of a man, was, in the first place, to be described with pathos, and if with humour, no otherwise than as the one could be reconciled with the other; but, second, it was the death not only of a man, but also of a Falstaff; and we could not but require that the description should revive the image and features of so memorable a character; if not, why describe it at all? The understanding

would as little bear to forget that it was the death-bed of a Falstaff, as the heart and affections to forget that it was the death-bed of a fellow-creature. Lastly, the description is given, not by the poet speaking in his own universal language, but by Mrs. Quickly—a character as individually portrayed, and as well known to us, as the subject of her description. Let me recapitulate: first, it was to be pathetic, as relating to a man; second, humorous, as relating to Falstaff; third, humorous in another style, as coming from Mrs. Quickly. These were difficulties rather greater than those of levelling hills, filling up valleys, and arranging trees, in picturesque groups: yet Capability Brown was allowed to exclaim, on surveying a conquest of his in this walk of art—"Ay! none but your Browns and your G—Almighties can do such things as these." Much more than might this irreverent speech be indulged to the gratitude of our veneration for Shakspeare, on witnessing such triumphs of his art. The simple words, "*and a' babbled of green fields,*" I should imagine, must have been read by many a thousand with tears and smiles at the same instant; I mean, connecting them with a previous knowledge of Falstaff and of Mrs. Quickly. Such then being demonstrably the possibility of blending, or fusing, as it were, the elements of pathos and of humour—and composing out of their union a third metal *sui generis* (as Corinthian brass, you know, is said to have been the product of all other metals, from the confluence of melted statues, etc., at the burning of Corinth)—I cannot but consider John Paul Richter as by far the most eminent artist in that way since the time of Shakspeare. What! you will say, greater than Sterne? I answer *yes*, to my thinking; and I could give some arguments and illustrations in support of this judgment. But I am not anxious to establish my own preference, as founded on anything of better authority than my idiosyncrasy, or more permanent, if you choose to think so, than my own caprice.

Judge as you will on this last point, that is, on the comparative pretensions of Sterne and Richter to the

spolia opima in the fields of pathos and of humour; yet in one pretension he not only leaves Sterne at an infinite distance in the rear, but really, for my part, I cease to ask who it is that he leaves behind him, for I begin to think with myself, who it is that he approaches. If a man could reach Venus or Mercury, we should not say he has advanced to a great distance from the earth: we should say, he is very near to the sun. So also, if in anything a man approaches Shakspeare, or does but remind us of him, all other honours are swallowed up in that: a relation of inferiority to him is a more enviable distinction than all degrees of superiority to others, the rear of *his* splendours a more eminent post than the supreme station in the van of all others. I have already mentioned one *quality* of excellence, viz. the interpenetration of the humorous and the pathetic, common to Shakspeare and John Paul: but this, apart from its *quantity* or degree, implies no more of a participation in Shakspearean excellence, than the possession of wit, judgment, good sense, etc., which, in some degree or other, must be common to all authors of any merit at all.

Thus far I have already said that I would not contest the point of precedence with the admirers of Sterne: but, in the claim I now advance for Richter, which respects a question of *degree*, I cannot allow of any competition at all from that quarter. What then is it that I claim? Briefly, an activity of understanding, so restless and indefatigable that all attempts to illustrate, or express it adequately by images borrowed from the natural world, from the motions of beasts, birds, insects, etc. from the leaps of tigers or leopards, from the gamboling and tumbling of kittens, the antics of monkeys, or the running of antelopes and ostriches, etc., are baffled, confounded, and made ridiculous by the enormous and overmastering superiority of impression left by the thing illustrated. The rapid, but uniform motions of the heavenly bodies, serve well enough to typify the grand and continuous motions of the Miltonic mind. But the wild, giddy, fantastic, capricious, incalculable, springing, vault-

ing, tumbling, dancing, waltzing, caprioling, *pirouetting*, sky-rocketing of the chamois, the harlequin, the Vestris, the storm-loving raven—the raven? no, the lark (for often he ascends “singing up to heaven’s gates,” but like the lark he dwells upon the earth), in short, of the Proteus, the Ariel, the Mercury, the monster—John Paul, can be compared to nothing in heaven or earth, or the waters under the earth, except to the motions of the same faculty as existing in Shakspeare.

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You will naturally collect from the account here given of John Paul’s activity of understanding and fancy, that over and above his humour, he must have an overflowing opulence of wit. In fact he has. On this earth of ours (I know nothing about the books in Jupiter, where Kant has proved that the authors will be far abler than any poor *Terrae Filius*, such as Shakspeare or Milton), but on this poor earth of ours I am acquainted with no book of such unintermitting and brilliant wit as his *Vorschule der Aesthetik*; it glitters like the stars on a frosty night; or like the stars on Count ——’s coat; or like the *ἀνάρηθμον γέλασμα*, the multitudinous laughing of the ocean under the glancing lights of sunbeams; or like a *feu-de-joie* of fireworks: in fact, John Paul’s works are the galaxy of the German literary firmament. I defy a man to lay his hand on that sentence which is not vital and ebullient with wit. What *is* wit? We are told that it is the perception of resemblances; whilst the perception of differences, we are requested to believe, is reserved for another faculty. Very profound distinctions no doubt, but very senseless for all that. I shall not here attempt a definition of wit: but I will just mention what I conceive to be one of the distinctions between wit and humour, viz., that whilst wit is a purely intellectual thing, into every act of the humorous mood there is an influx of the *moral* nature: rays, direct or refracted, from the will and the affections, from the disposition and the temperament, enter into all humour; and thence it is, that humour is of a diffusive quality, pervading an

entire course of thoughts; whilst wit—because it has no existence apart from certain logical relations of a thought which are definitely assignable, and can be counted even—is always punctually concentrated within the circle of a few words. On this account I would not advise you to read those of John Paul's works which are the wittiest, but those which are more distinguished for their humour.

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So far was Shakspeare from any capability of leaving behind him a malignant libel on a whole body of learned men, that, among all writers of every age, he stands forward as the one who looked most benignantly, and with the most fraternal eye, upon all the ways of men, however weak or foolish. From every sort of vice and infirmity he drew nutriment for his philosophic mind. It is to the honour of John Paul, that in this, as in other respects, he constantly reminds me of Shakspeare. Everywhere a spirit of kindness prevails; his satire is everywhere playful, delicate, and clad in smiles; never bitter, scornful, or malignant. But this is not all. I could produce many passages from Shakspeare, which show that, if his anger was ever roused, it was against the abuses of the time; not mere political abuses, but those that had a deeper root and dishonoured human nature. Here again the resemblance holds in John Paul; and this is the point in which I said that I would notice a bond of affinity between him and Schiller. Both were intolerant haters of ignoble things, though placable towards the ignoble men. Both yearned, according to their different temperaments, for a happier state of things: I mean for human nature generally, and, in a political sense, for Germany. To his latest years, Schiller, when suffering under bodily decay and anguish, was an earnest contender for whatever promised to elevate human nature, and bore emphatic witness against the evils of the time. John Paul, who still lives, is of a gentler nature; but his aspirations tend to the same point, though expressed in a milder and more hopeful spirit. With all this, how-

ever, they give a rare lesson on the *manner* of conducting such a cause; for you will nowhere find that they take any indecent liberties, of a personal sort, with those princes whose governments they most abhorred. Though safe enough from their vengeance, they never forgot in their indignation, as patriots and as philosophers, the respect due to the rank of others, or to themselves as scholars, and the favourites of their country. Some other modern authors of Germany *may* be great writers; but Frederick Schiller and John Paul Richter I shall always view with the feelings due to great men.

GOETHE'S *WILHELM MEISTER*

[Some admirers of De Quincey may think that I do him an ill turn by including in this volume passages from his savage onslaught upon Goethe and *Wilhelm Meister*. But if it is right to exhibit his criticism in its breadth, its insight, its liberality, when it is based on large principles and sifted knowledge, it is also advisable that the reader should see what it can become when—which does not often happen—De Quincey allows himself to be swayed by prejudice and caprice. He wrote wisely of Kant, enthusiastically of Schiller and Herder and Richter, and he was the first to make Englishmen acquainted with the learning and aesthetic philosophy of Lessing's *Laocoon*. But if he was in advance of all his contemporaries except Coleridge and Carlyle in his recognition of the value of modern German literature, he was keenly alive to its weaknesses, to its misty theorizing, its sentimentality, its mawkishness, its want of spiritual depth. These faults he believed to be exemplified and exaggerated in Goethe, particularly in the *Meister* books. He was wilfully and unaccountably irresponsible to all that accompanies and compensates for the defects of the *Lehrjahre* and the *Wanderjahre*. Yet can we say that his scarifying rigmarole is wholly undeserved? After all, there *is* dulness, there *is* coarseness, there *is* a most muddy and slobbering amorosity instead of clear and flamelike passion, in this famous romance which Germany now reads rather unwillingly, and England, I think, not at all. One cannot deny that there is common-sense as well as abundant wit and satire in De Quincey's overdone "ragging" and slashing of "Mr. Goethe" with all its Philistine irreverence.

The criticism of *Wilhelm Meister* appeared in two numbers of the *London Magazine* for 1824 as a review of Carlyle's translation of the *Lehrjahre*, which had just been published. The first part,

which contained an angry attack on the translator, was not repeated in the Collective Edition, Carlyle and De Quincey having in the meanwhile become good friends. Some years later De Quincey contributed to the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* a short memoir of Goethe, in which more justice is done to the great man, though there is still a protest against "the extravagant partisanship" which had "conferred upon every work proceeding from his pen a sort of papal indulgence, an immunity from criticism, or even from the appeals of good sense, such as it is not wholesome that any man should enjoy."]

MIGNON.—The situation or character, one or both, of this young person, is relied upon by all the admirers of Goethe as the most brilliant achievement of his poetic powers. We, on our part, are no less ready to take our stand on this as the most unequivocal evidence of depraved taste and defective sensibility. The reader might in this instance judge for himself with very little waste of time, if he were to mark the margin of those paragraphs in which the name of Mignon occurs, and to read them detached from all the rest. An odd way, we admit, of examining a work of any art, if it were really composed on just principles of art: and the inference is pretty plain, where such an insulation is possible; which, in the case of Mignon, it is. The translator, indeed, is bound to think *not*: for, with a peculiar infelicity of judgment natural enough to a critic who writes in the character of a eulogist, he says of this person, that "her history runs like a thread of gold through the tissue of the narrative, connecting with the heart much that were else addressed only to the head." But a glittering metaphor is always suspicious in criticism: in this case it should naturally imply that Mignon in some way or other modifies the action and actors of the piece. Now, it is certain that never was there a character in drama or in novel on which any stress was laid, which so little influenced the movement of the story. Nothing is either hastened or retarded by Mignon: she neither acts nor is acted upon: and we challenge the critic to point to any incident or situation of interest which would not remain uninjured though Mignon were wholly removed from the story. So removeable a person can

hardly be a connecting thread of gold; unless, indeed, under the notion of a thread which everywhere betrays, by difference of colour or substance, its refusal to blend with the surrounding tissue; a notion which is far from the meaning of the critic.

But without dwelling on this objection: the relation of Mignon to the other characters and the series of the incidents is none at all: but, waiving this, let us examine her character and her situation each for itself, and not as any part of a novel. The character in this case, if Mignon can be said to have one, arises out of the situation. And what is that? For the information of the reader, we shall state it as accurately as possible. First of all, Mignon is the offspring of an incestuous connection between a brother and sister. Here let us pause one moment to point the reader's attention to Mr. Goethe, who is now at his old tricks; never relying on the grand high-road sensibilities of human nature, but always travelling into bypaths of unnatural or unhallowed interest. Suicide, adultery, incest, monstrous situations, or manifestations of supernatural power, are the stimulants to which he constantly resorts in order to rouse his own feelings, originally feeble, and, long before the date of this work, grown torpid from artificial excitement. In the case before us, what purpose is answered by the use of an expedient, the very name of which is terrific and appalling to men of all nations, habits, and religions? What comes of it? What use, what result can be pleaded to justify the tampering with such tremendous agencies? The father of Mignon, it may be answered, goes mad. He does: but is a madness, such as his, a justifying occasion for such an adjuration; is this a *dignus vindice nodus*? a madness, which is mere senile dotage and fatuity, pure childish imbecility, without passion, without dignity, and characterized by no one feeling but such as is base and selfish, viz., a clinging to life, and an inexplicable *dread of little boys*! A state so mean might surely have arisen from some cause less awful: and we must add that a state so capriciously and fantastically conceived,

so little arising out of any determinate case of passion, or capable of expressing any case of passion as its natural language, is to be justified only by a downright affidavit to the facts, and is not a proper object for the contemplation of a poet, we submit. Madhouses doubtless furnish many cases of fatuity, no less eccentric and to all appearance arbitrary: as facts, as known realities, they do not on this account cease to be affecting; but as poetic creations, which must include their own law, they become unintelligible and monstrous.

Besides, we are conceding too much to Mr. Goethe: the fatuity of the old man is nowhere connected with the unhappy circumstances of his previous life; on the whole it seems to be the product of mere constitutional weakness of brain, or probably is a liver case: for he is put under the care of a mad doctor; and, by the help chiefly of a *course of newspapers*, he begins to recover; and finally he recovers altogether by one of the oddest prescriptions in the world: he puts a glassful of laudanum into a "firm, little, ground-glass phial:" of this, however, he never drinks, but simply keeps it in his pocket; and the consciousness that he carries suicide in his waistcoat pocket reconciles him to life, and puts the finishing hand to the "recovery of his reason" (p. 274). With such a pocket companion about him, the reader would swear now that this old gentleman, if he must absolutely commit suicide for the good of the novel, will die by laudanum. Why else have we so circumstantial an account of the "ground-glass phial," drawn up as if by some great auctioneer—Christie or Squibb—for some great Catalogue ("No. so and so, one firm, little, ground-glass phial"). But no; he who is born to be hanged will never be drowned; and the latter end of the old half-wit is as follows: being discharged as cured (or incurable) he one day enters a nobleman's house, where by the way he had no sort of introduction; in this house, as it happens, Wilhelm Meister is a visitor, and has some difficulty in recognizing his former friend "an *old harper with a long beard*" in a *young gentleman*, who is practising as a dandy in an early stage. Goethe has an

irresistible propensity to freeze his own attempts at the pathetic by a blighting air of the ludicrous. Accordingly in the present case he introduces his man of woe as "cleanly and genteelly dressed;" "beard vanished;"¹ hair dressed with some attention to the mode; and in his countenance the *look of age no longer to be seen.*" This last item certainly is as wondrous as Mr. Coleridge's *reading fly*: and we suspect that the old Æson, who had thus recovered his juvenility, deceived himself when he fancied that he carried his laudanum as a mere *reversionary* friend who held a sinecure in his waistcoat pocket; that in fact he must have drunk of it "pretty considerably." Be that as it may, at his first *début* he behaves decently; rather dull he is, perhaps, but rational, "cleanly," polite, and (we are happy to state) able to face any little boy, the most determined that ever carried pop-gun.

But such heroism could not be expected to last for ever: soon after he finds a MS. which contains an account of his own life; and upon reading it he prepares for suicide. And let *us* prepare also, as shorthand writers to a genuine GERMAN SUICIDE! In such a case now, if the novel were an English novel, supposing, for instance, of our composition, who are English reviewers, or of our reader's composition (who are probably English readers); if then we were reduced to the painful necessity of inflicting capital punishment upon one or two of our characters (as surely in our own novel, where all the people are our own creatures, we have the clearest right to put all of them to death); matters, we say, being come to that pass that we were called on to make an example of a mutineer or two, and it were fully agreed that the thing must be; we should cause them to take their laudanum, or their rifle bullet, as the case might be and die *sans phrase*; die (as our friend "the Dramatist" says):

Die nobly, die like demigods.

¹ "*Vanished*:" or should we read perhaps *varnished*?

Not so our German: he takes the matter more coolly; and dies transcendently; "by cold gradation and well-balanced form." First of all, he became convinced that it was now "impossible for him to live:" that is, the idea struck him in the way of a theory: it was a new idea, a German idea, and he was pleased with it. Next he considered that, as he designed to depart this life *se offendendo*. "Argal" if the water would not come to him he must look out for the water; so he pulls out the "ground-glass phial," and pours out his laudanum into a glass of "almond milk." Almond milk! Was there ever such a German blunder! But to proceed: having mixed his potion, a potion unknown to all the pharmacopœias in Christendom, "he raised it to his mouth; but he shuddered when it reached his lips; he set it down untasted; went out to walk once more across the garden," etc. (p. 284). O fie, fie! Mr. Mignonette!¹ this is sad work: "walking across the garden," and "shuddering," and "doing nothing," as Macmorris (*Henry V*) says, "when by Chrish there is work to be done, and throats to be cut."

He returns from the garden, and is baulked in his purpose by a scene too ludicrous to mention amongst such tender and affecting matter; and thus for one day he gets a reprieve. Now this is what we call false mercy: well knowing that his man was to die, why should Mr. G. keep him lingering in this absurd way? Such a line of conduct shall have no countenance in any novel that we may write. Once let a man of ours be condemned, and if he won't drink off his laudanum, then (as Bernardine says, *Measure for Measure*) we will "beat out his brains with billets," but he shall die that same day, without further trouble to ourselves or our readers. Now, on the contrary, Mr. Mignonette takes three days in dying: within which term we are bold to

¹ His name is *not* Mignonette, Mr. Goethe will say. No: in fact he has no name: but he is father to Mignon; and therefore in default of a better name we cannot see why we should not be at liberty to call him Mignonette.

say that any reasonable man would have been sat upon by the coroner, buried, unburied by the resurrection-man, and demonstrated upon by the anatomical Professor. Well, to proceed with this long concern of Mr. Mignonette's suicide, which travels as slowly as a Chancery suit or as the York coach in Charles II's reign (note: this coach took fourteen days between York and London, *vide* Eden's *State of the Poor*). To proceed, we say: on the second day, Mr. Mignonette cut his own throat with his own razor: and *that*, you will say, was doing something towards the object we all have in view. It was; at least it might seem so; but there's no trusting to appearances; it's not every man that will die because his throat is cut: a Cambridge man of this day¹ (*Diary of an Invalid*) saw a man at Rome, who, or whose head rather, continued to express various sentiments through his eyes after he (or his head) had been entirely amputated from him (or his body). By the way, this man might have some little headache perhaps, but he must have been charmingly free from indigestion.

But this is digressing: to return to Mr. Mignonette. In conversing with a friend upon his case, we took a bet that, for all his throat was cut, he would talk again, and talk very well too. Our friend conceived the thing to be impossible; but he knew nothing of German. "It cannot be," said he, "for when the larynx—" "Ay, bless your heart!" we interrupted him, "but in this case the larynx of the party was a German larynx." However, to go on with Mr. Mignonette's suicide. His throat is cut; and still, as Macmorris would be confounded to hear, "by Chrish there is nothing done:" for a doctor mends it again (p. 283), and at p. 284 we win our bet; for he talks as well as ever he did in his life; only we are concerned to say that his fear of little boys returns. But still he talks down to the very last line of p. 284; in which line,

¹ Matthews, a man of extraordinary intellectual promise, and a special friend of Lord Byron's. He defrauded all the expectations of his friends by dying prematurely. The reader will do well, however, to look into his *Diary*.

by the way, is the very last word he is known to have uttered; and that is "glass;" not, however, that well-known unexceptionable "firm little ground-glass phial," but another which had less right to his dying recollections.

Now then, having heard the "last word of dying Mignonette," the reader fondly conceives that certainly Mignonette is dead. *Mit nichten*, as they say in Germany, by no means; Mignonette is *not* dead, nor like to be for one day; nor perhaps would he have been dead at this moment if he had not been a *German* Mignonette; being so, however, the whole benefit of a German throat is defeated. His throat is mended by the surgeon; but having once conceived a German theory that it was impossible for him to live, although he is so composed as to relate his own theory and the incident which caused it, he undoes all that the doctor has done, tears away the bandages, and bleeds to death. This event is ascertained on the morning after he had uttered his last word, "glass;" the brittle glass of Mignonette's life is at length broken past even a German skill to repair it; and Mignonette is dead,—dead as a door nail, we believe; though we have still some doubts whether he will not again be mended and reappear in some future novel; our reason for which is not merely his extreme tenacity of life, which is like that of a tortoise, but also because we observe that though he is said to be dead, he is not buried; nor does anybody take any further notice of him or even mention his name; but all about him fall to marrying and giving in marriage; and a few pages wind up the whole novel in a grand *bravura* of kissing and catch-match-making: we have Mr. Goethe's word for it, however, that Mignonette is dead, and he ought to know. But, be that as it may, nothing is so remarkable as the extreme length of time which it took to do the trick: not until "the third rosy-fingered morn appears" (to speak Homericly) is the suicide accomplished; three days it took to kill this old young man, this flower, this Mignonette: which we take to be, if not the boldest, the longest suicide on record. And so

much for Mr. Mignonette; and so much for a German suicide.¹

HISTORY OF MR. MEISTER'S "AFFAIRS OF THE HEART"

First we find him "in love" (oh! dishonoured phrase!) with Mariana; rapturously in love, if the word of Mr. Goethe were a sufficient guarantee. Not so, however. An author may assert what he will of his own creatures; and as long as he does not himself contradict it by the sentiments, wishes, or conduct which he attributes to them, we are to take his word for it; but no longer. We, who cannot condescend to call by the name of "love" the fancies for a pretty face, which vanish before a week's absence or before a face somewhat prettier, still less the appetites of a selfish voluptuary, know what to think of Wilhelm's passion, its depth, and its purity, when we find (p. 211, i) "the current of his spirits and ideas" stopped by "the spasm of a sharp jealousy." Jealousy about whom? Mariana? No, but Philina. And by whom excited? By the "boy" Frederick. His jealousy was no light one; it was "a fierce jealousy" (p. 221, i); it caused him "a general discomfort, such as he had never felt in his life before (p. 211, i); and, had not decency restrained him, he could have "crushed in pieces all the people round him" (p. 221, i). Such a jealousy, with regard to Philina, is incompatible, we presume, with any real fervour of love for Mariana: we are now therefore at liberty to infer that Mariana is dethroned, and that Philina reigneth in her stead. Next he is "in love" with the Countess; and Philina seldom appears to him as an object of any other feelings than those of contempt. Fourthly, at page 45, ii, he falls desperately in love with "the Amazon," *i.e.*, a young lady mounted on a grey

¹ Mignonette has taken so long in killing that we have no room for Mignon in the gallery; but as she is easily detached from the novel, we hope to present her on some other opportunity as a cabinet picture.

courser, and wrapped up in "a man's white great-coat." His love for this *incognita* holds on throughout the work like the standing bass, but not so as to prevent a running accompaniment, in the treble, of various other "passions."

And these passions not merely succeed each other with rapidity, but are often all upon him at once; at p. 64, ii, "the recollection of the amiable Countess is to Wilhelm infinitely sweet; but anon, the figure of the noble Amazon would step between;" and two pages further on he is indulging in day-dreams that "perhaps Mariana might appear," or, "above all, the beauty whom he worshipped" (*i.e.*, the Amazon). Here, therefore, there is a sort of glee for three voices between the Countess, Mariana, and the Amazon. Fifthly, he is in love with Theresa, the other Amazon. And this love is no joke; for at p. 134, iii, meditating upon "her great virtues" (and we will add, her political economy) he writes a letter offering her his hand; and at this time (what time? why, post time to be sure) "his resolution was so firm, and the business was of such importance" that, lest Major Socrates should intercept his letter, he carries it himself to the office. But, sixthly, see what the resolutions of men are! In the very next chapter, and when time has advanced only by ten pages (but unfortunately after the letter-bags were made up), Wilhelm finds himself furiously in love with a friend of Theresa's; not that he has seen her since post-time, but he has been reminded of her: this lady is Natalia, and turns out to be "the Amazon." No sooner has he a prospect of seeing her than "all the glories of the sky," he vows, "are as nothing to the moment which he looks for."

In the next page (145), this moment arrives; Wilhelm reaches the house where she lives; on entering, "finds it the most *earnest* and (as he almost felt) the holiest place which he had ever trod;" on going upstairs to the drawing-room is obliged to kneel down "to get a moment's breathing time;" can scarcely raise himself again; and upon actual introduction to the divinity, "falls upon his knee, seizes her hand, and kisses it with unbounded rapture." What's to be done now, Mr.

Meister? Pity you had not known this the night before, or had intrusted your letter to Socrates, or had seen some verses we could have sent you from England—

'Tis good to be merry and wise,
'Tis good to be honest and true;
'Tis good to be off with the old love,
Before you be on with the new.

Matters begin to look black, especially as Theresa accepts his offer; and (as though Satan himself had a plot against him) in consequence of that very visit to Natalia which made him pray that she would not. "I hope you will be grateful," says the new love: "for she (viz., the old love) asked me for advice; and as it happened that you were here just then, I was enabled to destroy the few scruples which my friend still entertained." Here's delectable news. A man receives a letter from a lady who has had "her scruples"—accepting him nevertheless, but begging permission "at times to bestow a cordial thought upon her former friend" (Lothario to wit): in return for which she "will press his child (by a former mother) to her heart:" such a letter he receives from one Amazon; "when with terror he discovers in his heart most vivid traces of an inclination" for another Amazon. A man can't marry two Amazons.

Well, thank Heaven! it's no scrape of ours. A German wit has brought us all into it; and a German *dénouement* shall help us all out. *Le voici!* There are two Amazons, the reader knows. Good: now one of these is *ci-devant* sweetheart to Lothario, the other his sister. What may prevent therefore that Meister shall have the sister, and Lothario (according to Horace's arrangement with Lydias) his old sweetheart? Nothing but this sweetheart's impatience, who (p. 184, iii) "dreads that she shall lose *him*" (Meister) "and not regain Lothario;" *i.e.*, between two chairs, etc., and as Meister will not come to her, though she insists upon it in letter after letter, she comes to Meister; determined to "hold him fast" (p. 184, iii). O Amazon

of little faith! put your trust in Mr. Goethe, and he will deliver you! This¹ he does by a *coup de théâtre*. That lady whose passions had carried her into the South of France, had bestowed some of her favours upon Lothario: but she is reputed the mother of Theresa; and hence had arisen the separation between Theresa and Lothario. This maternal person however is suddenly discovered NOT to be the mother of Theresa: the road is thus opened to a general winding up of the whole concern; and the novel, as we said before, hastens to its close amid a grand *bravura* of kissing and catch-match-making. In the general row, even old Major Socrates catches a wife; and a young one¹ too, though probably enough we fear a Xantippe.

Thus we have made Mr. von Goethe's novel speak for itself. And, whatever impression it may leave on the reader's mind, let it be charged upon the composer. If that impression is one of entire disgust, let it not be forgotten that it belongs exclusively to Mr. Goethe. The music is his: we have but arranged the concert, and led in the orchestra.

Even thus qualified, however, the task is not to us an agreeable one: our practice is to turn away our eyes from whatsoever we are compelled to loath or to disdain; and to leave all that dishonours human nature to travel on its natural road to shame and oblivion. If in this instance we depart from that maxim, it is in consideration of the rank which the author has obtained elsewhere, and through his partisans is struggling for in this country. Without the passport of an eminent name, *Wilhelm Meister* is a safe book; but backed in that way the dullest books are floated into popularity (thousands

¹ This young lady we overlooked in the general muster: her name is Lydia; and her little history is that she had first of all set her cap at Lothario and succeeded in bringing him to her feet; secondly, had been pushed aside to make room for Theresa; thirdly, had forced herself into Lothario's house and bedroom under the pretext of nursing him when wounded; but fourthly, had been fairly ejected from both house and bedroom by a stratagem in which "our friend" in the character of toad-eater takes a most ungentlemanly part.

echoing their praise, who are not aware of the matter they contain): and thus even such books become influential and are brought within the remark of Cicero (*De Legg.* lib. 3) on the mischief done by profligate men of rank: "Quod non solum vitia concipiunt, sed ea infundunt in civitatem; neque solum obsunt quia ipsi corrumpuntur, sed quia corrumpunt; plusque exemplo quam peccato nocent."

HISTORY

[One of the things which De Quincey missed being was a great historian. If he had possessed the capacity for carrying out a work which involved sustained and systematic labour devoted to a single subject he might have made a notable addition to the classics of historical literature. His essays in history and biography show that to his erudition, his keen insight, his independence of view, he added a full measure of the historic sense. The word evolution was not in fashion when he wrote, but De Quincey had grasped what it meant when applied to the conduct of man in society, and the growth of states and people; he could have been as learned as Gibbon, and more philosophic; and the dignity and force of his style, with the rush and movement of his narrative manner, might have made him, if the conditions had been propitious, something between an English Tacitus and an English Livy. *Dis aliter visum est.* De Quincey was fated to produce only fragments: very fine and carefully finished fragments in some cases, like his series of essays on the Roman Caesars, which belong to the literature of knowledge, while his *Revolt of the Tartars*, a singularly impressive piece of dramatic description, may claim its place in the literature of power. This latter is too long to quote; it must be read as a whole, for its effect is cumulative, and it could not be fairly represented by extracts. The passage given below is from a paper, "Philosophy of Roman History," published in *Blackwood* in November 1839.]

THE DECAY OF ROME

IT would be thought strange indeed if there should exist a large, a memorable, section of history, traversed by many a scholar with various objects, reviewed by many a reader in a spirit of anxious scrutiny, and yet to this hour misunderstood; erroneously appreciated; its tendencies mistaken, and its whole meaning, import, value, not so much inadequately as falsely, ignorantly, perversely, deciphered. *Primâ facie*, one would pronounce this impossible. Nevertheless, it is a truth; and it is a

solemn truth; and what gives to it this solemnity is the mysterious meaning, the obscure hint of a still profounder meaning in the background, which begins to dawn upon the eye when first piercing the darkness now resting on the subject.

Perhaps no one arc or segment, detached from the total cycle of human records, promises so much beforehand, so much instruction, so much gratification to curiosity, so much splendour, so much depth of interest, as the great period—the systole and diastole, flux and reflux—of the Western Roman Empire. Its parentage was magnificent and Titanic. It was a birth out of the death-struggles of the colossal Republic; its foundations were laid by that sublime dictator, “the foremost man of all this world,” who was unquestionably for comprehensive talents the Lucifer, the Protagonist, of all antiquity. Its range, the compass of its extent, was appalling to the imagination. Coming last amongst what are called the Great Monarchies of Prophecy, it was the only one which realized in perfection the idea of a *monarchia*, being (except for Parthia and the great fable of India beyond it) strictly coincident with ἡ οἰκουμένη, or the civilized world. Civilization and this Empire were commensurate; they were interchangeable ideas, and co-extensive. Finally, the path of this great Empire, through its arch of progress, synchronized with that of Christianity: the ascending orbit of each was pretty nearly the same, and traversed the same series of generations. These elements, in combination, seemed to promise a succession of golden harvests: from the specular station of the Augustan age, the eye caught glimpses by anticipation of some glorious El Dorado for human hopes. What was the practical result for our historic experience? Answer—A sterile Zaarrah. Prelibations, as of some heavenly vintage, were inhaled by the Virgils of the day, looking forward in the spirit of prophetic rapture; whilst, in the very sadness of truth, from that age forwards the Roman World drank from stagnant marshes. A paradise of roses was prefigured; a wilderness of thorns was found.

Even this fact has been missed—even the bare fact has been overlooked; much more the causes, the principles, the philosophy of this fact. The rapid barbarism which closed in behind Caesar's chariot wheels has been hid by the pomp and equipage of the imperial court. The vast power and domination of the Roman Empire, for the three centuries which followed the battle of Actium, have dazzled the historic eye, and have had the usual re-action on the power of vision: a dazzled eye is always left in a condition of darkness. The battle of Actium was followed by the final conquest of Egypt. That conquest rounded and integrated the glorious empire; it was now circular as a shield—orbicular as the disk of a planet; the great Julian arch was now locked into the cohesion of granite by its last keystone. From that day forward, for three hundred years, there was silence in the world: no muttering was heard: no eye winked beneath the wing. Winds of hostility might still rave at intervals: but it was on the outside of the mighty empire; it was at a dream-like distance; and, like the storms that beat against some monumental castle, "and at the doors and windows seem to call," they rather irritated and vivified the sense of security than at all disturbed its luxurious lull.

That seemed to all men the consummation of political wisdom—the ultimate object of all strife—the very euthanasia of war. Except on some fabulous frontier, armies seemed gay pageants of the Roman rank rather than necessary bulwarks of the Roman power: spear and shield were idle trophies of the past: "the trumpet spoke not to the alarmed throng." Hush, ye palpitations of Rome! was the cry of the superb Aurelian,¹

¹ "Of the superb Aurelian."—The particular occasion was the insurrection in the East, of which the ostensible leaders were the great lieutenants of Palmyra—Odenathus, and his widow, Zenobia. The alarm at Rome was out of all proportion to the danger, and well illustrated the force of the great historian's aphorism, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*. In one sentence of his despatch, Aurelian aimed at a contest with the great Julian gasconade of *Veni, vidi, vici*. His words are: *Fugavimus, obsedimus, cruciavimus, occidimus*.

from his far-off pavilion in the deserts of the Euphrates—Hush, fluttering heart of the Eternal City! Fall back into slumber, ye wars, and rumours of wars! Turn upon your couches of down, ye Children of Romulus—sink back into your voluptuous repose! We, your almighty armies, have chased into darkness those phantoms that had broken your dreams. We have chased, we have besieged, we have crucified, we have slain. “Nihil est, Romulei Quirites, quod timere possitis. Ego efficiam ne sit aliqua sollicitudo Romana. Vacate ludis, vacate circensibus. Nos publicae necessitates teneant: vos occupent voluptates.” Did ever Siren warble so dulcet a song to ears already prepossessed and medicated with spells of Circean effeminacy?

But in this world all things re-act; and the very extremity of any force is the seed and nucleus of a counter-agency. You might have thought it as easy (in the words of Shakspeare) to

Wound the loud winds, or with be-mock'd-at stabs
Kill the still-closing waters,

as to violate the majesty of the imperial eagle, or to ruffle “one dowle that’s in his plume.” But luxurious ease is the surest harbinger of pain: and the dead lulls of tropical seas are the immediate forerunners of tornadoes. The more absolute was the security obtained by Caesar for his people, the more inevitable was his own ruin. Scarcely had Aurelian sung his requiem to the agitations of Rome, before a requiem was sung by his assassins to his own warlike spirit. Scarcely had Probus, another Aurelian, proclaimed the eternity of peace, and, by way of attesting his own martial supremacy, had commanded “that the brazen throat of war should cease to roar,” when the trumpets of the four winds proclaimed his own death by murder. Not as anything extraordinary; for, in fact, violent death—death by assassination—was the regular portal (the *porta Libitina*, or funeral gate) through which the Caesars passed out of this world; and to die in their beds was the very rare exception to that stern rule of fate. Not,

therefore, as in itself at all noticeable, but because this particular murder of Probus stands scenically contrasted with the great vision of *Peace* which he fancied as lying in clear revelation before him, permit us, before we proceed with our argument, to rehearse his golden promises. The sabres were already unsheathed, the shirt-sleeves were already pushed up from those murderous hands which were to lacerate his throat and to pierce his heart, when he ascended the Pisgah from which he descried the Saturnian ages to succeed:—"Brevi," said he, "milites non necessarios habebimus. Romanus jam miles erit nullus. Omnia possidebimus. Respublica orbis terrarum, ubique segura, non arma fabricabit. Boves habebuntur aratro; equus nascetur ad pacem. Nulla erunt bella, nulla captivitas. Ubique pax; ubique Romanae leges; ubique judices nostri." The historian himself, tame and creeping as he is in his ordinary style, warms in sympathy with the Emperor; his diction blazes up into a sudden explosion of prophetic grandeur; and he adopts all the views of Caesar. "Nonne omnes barbaras nationes subjecerat pedibus?" he demands with lyrical tumult, and then, while confessing the immediate disappointment of his hopes, thus repeats the great elements of the public felicity whenever they should be realized by a Caesar equally martial for others, but more fortunate for himself:—"Aeternos thesauros haberet Romana Respublica. Nihil expenderetur a principe; nihil a possessore redderetur. Aureum profecto seculum promittebat. Nulla futura erant castra: nusquam lituus audiendus: arma non erant fabricanda. Populus iste militantium, qui nunc bellis civilibus Rempublicam vexat"—ay, how was *that* to be absorbed? How would that vast crowd of half-pay *emeriti* employ itself? "Araret; studiis incumberet: erudiretur artibus: navigaret." And he closes his prophetic raptures thus: "Adde quod nullus occideretur in bello. Dii boni! quid tandem vos offenderet Respublica Romana, cui talem principem sustulistis?"

Even in his lamentations, it is clear that he mourns as for a blessing delayed—not finally denied. The land

of promise still lay, as before, in steady vision below his feet, only that it waited for some happier Augustus, who, in the great lottery of Caesarian destinies, might happen to draw the rare prize of a prosperous reign not prematurely blighted by the assassin; with whose purple *alourgis* might mingle no *fasciae* of crape—with whose imperial laurels might entwine no ominous cypress. The hope of a millennial armistice, of an eternal rest for the earth, was not dead; once again only, and for a time, it was sleeping in abeyance and expectation. That blessing, that millennial blessing, it seems, might be the gift of Imperial Rome.

Well—and why not? the reader demands. What have we to say against it? This Caesar, or that historian, may have carried his views a little too far, or too prematurely; yet, after all, the very enormity of what they promised must be held to argue the enormity of what had been accomplished. To give any plausibility to a scheme of perpetual peace, war must already have become rare, and must have been banished to a prodigious distance. It was no longer the hearths and the altars, home and religious worship, which quaked under the tumults of war. It was the purse which suffered—the exchequer of the state; secondly, the exchequer of each individual; thirdly, and in the end, the interests of agriculture, of commerce, of navigation. This is what the historian indicates in promising his brother Romans that *omnia possidebimus*, by which, perhaps, he did not mean to lay the stress on *omnia*, as if, in addition to their own property, they were to have that of alien or frontier nations, but (laying the stress on the word *possidebimus*) meant to say, with regard to property already their own—“We shall no longer hold it as joint proprietors with the state, and as liable to fluctuating taxation, but shall henceforwards *possess* it in absolute exclusive property.” This is what he indicates in saying, *Boves habebuntur aratro*; that is, the oxen, one and all available for the plough, shall no longer be open to the everlasting claims of the public *frumentarii* for conveying supplies to the frontier

armies. This is what he indicates in saying of the individual liable to military service that he should no longer live to slay or to be slain, for barren bloodshed or violence, but that henceforth *araret* or *navigaret*. All these passages, by pointing the expectations emphatically to benefits of purse exonerated, and industry emancipated, sufficiently argue the class of interests which then suffered by war; that it was the interests of private property, of agricultural improvement, of commercial industry, upon which exclusively fell the evils of a belligerent state under the Roman empire: and there already lies a mighty blessing achieved for social existence when sleep is made sacred and thresholds secure; when the temple of human life is safe, and the temple of female honour is hallowed. These great interests, it is admitted, were sheltered under the mighty dome of the Roman empire: that is already an advance made towards the highest civilization; and this is not shaken because a particular emperor should be extravagant or a particular historian romantic.

No, certainly: but stop a moment at this point. Civilization, to the extent of security for life and the primal rights of man, necessarily grows out of every strong government. And it follows also that, as this government widens its sphere, as it pushes back its frontiers *ultra et Garamantas et Indos*, in that proportion will the danger diminish (for in fact the possibility diminishes) of foreign incursions. The sense of permanent security from conquest, or from the inroad of marauders, must of course have been prodigiously increased when the nearest standing enemy of Rome was beyond the Tigris and the Inn, as compared with those times when Carthage, Spain, Gaul, Macedon, presented a ring-fence of venomous rivals, and when every little nook in the eastern Mediterranean swarmed with pirates. Thus far, inevitably, the Roman police, planting one foot of its golden compasses in the same eternal centre, and with the other describing an arc continually wider, must have banished all idea of public enemies, and have deepened the sense of security beyond calculation. Thus far we have the benefits of police, and those are amongst the

earliest blessings of civilization; and they are one indispensable condition, what in logic is called the *conditio sine quâ non*, for all the other blessings. But that, in other words, is a *negative* cause, a cause which, being absent, the effect is absent; but not the *positive* cause, or *causa sufficiens*, which being present, the effect will be present. The security of the Roman empire was the indispensable condition, but not in itself a sufficient cause, of those other elements which compose a true civilization. Rome was the centre of a high police, which radiated to Parthia eastwards, to Britain westwards; but not of a high civilization.

On the contrary, what we maintain is—that the Roman civilization was imperfect *ab intra*—imperfect in its central principle; was a piece of watchwork that began to go down, to lose its spring, and was slowly retrograding to a dead stop from the very moment that it had completed its task of foreign conquest: that it was kept going from the very first by strong reaction and antagonism: that it fell into torpor from the moment when this antagonism ceased to operate: that thenceforwards it oscillated backwards violently to barbarism: that, left to its own principles of civilization, the Roman empire was barbarizing rapidly from the time of Trajan: that, abstracting from all alien agencies whatever, whether accelerating or retarding, and supposing Western Rome to have been thrown exclusively upon the resources and elasticity of her own proper civilization, she was crazy and superannuated by the time of Commodus—must soon have gone to pieces, must have foundered; and, under any possible benefit from favourable accidents co-operating with alien forces, could not by any great term have retarded that doom which was written on her drooping energies, prescribed by internal decay, and not at all (as is universally imagined) by external assault.

“Barbarizing rapidly!” the reader murmurs—“Barbarism! Oh, yes, I remember the Barbarians broke in upon the Western Empire—the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals, Burgundians, Huns, Heruli, and swarms be-

side. These wretches had no taste, no literature, probably very few ideas, and naturally they barbarized and rebarbarized wherever they moved. But surely the writer errs: this influx of barbarism was not in Trajan's time, at the very opening of the second century of Christ, but throughout the fifth century." No, reader; it is not we who err, but you. These were not the barbarians of Rome. That is the miserable fiction of Italian vanity, always stigmatizing better men than themselves by the name of barbarians; and, in fact, we all know that to be ultramontane is with them to be a barbarian. The horrible charge against the Greeks of old, viz., *sua tantum mirantur*, a charge implying in its objects the last descent of narrow sensibility and of illiterate bigotry, in modern times has been true only of two nations, and those two are the French and the Italians. But, waiving that topic, we affirm—and it is the purpose of our essay to affirm—that the barbarism of Rome grew out of Rome herself; that these pretended barbarians—Gothic, Vandalish,¹ Lombard—or by whatever name known to modern history—were in reality the restorers and regenerators of the effete Roman intellect; that, but for them, the indigenous Italian would probably have died out in scrofula, madness, leprosy; that the sixth or seventh century would have seen the utter extinction of these Italian *strulbrugs*; for which opinion, if it were important, we could show cause.

But it is much less important to show cause in behalf of this negative proposition—"that the Goths and Vandals were *not* the barbarians of the western empire"

¹ "Pretended barbarians, Gothic, Vandalish," etc.—Had it been true that these tramontane people were as ferocious in manners and appearance as was alleged, it would not therefore have followed that they were barbarous in their modes of thinking and feeling; or, if that also had been true, surely it became the Romans to recollect what very barbarians, both in mind and manners and appearance, were some of their own Caesars. Meantime, it appears that not only Alaric the Goth, but even Attila the Hun, in popular repute the most absolute ogre of all the Transalpine invaders, turns out in more thoughtful representations to have been a prince of peculiarly mild demeanour, and apparently upright character.

—than in behalf of this affirmative proposition, “that the Romans *were*.” We do not wish to overlay the subject, but simply to indicate a few of the many evidences which it is in our power to adduce. We mean to rely, for the present, upon four arguments as exponents of the barbarous and barbarizing tone of feeling which, like so much moss or lichens, had gradually overgrown the Roman mind, and by the third century had strangled all healthy vegetation of natural and manly thought. During this third century it was, in its latter half, that most of the *Augustan History* was probably composed. Laying aside the two Victors, Dion Cassius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and a few more indirect notices of history during this period, there is little other authority for the annals of the Western Empire than this *Augustan History*, and at all events, this is the chief well-head of that history; hither we must resort for most of the personal biography and the portraiture of characters connected with that period, and here only we find the regular series of princes—the whole gallery of Caesars, from Trajan to the immediate predecessor of Diocletian. The composition of this work has been usually distributed amongst six authors, viz., Spartian, Capitolinus, Lampridius, Volcatius Gallicanus, Trebellius Pollio, and Vopiscus. Their several shares, it is true, have been much disputed to and fro, and other questions have been raised affecting the very existence of some amongst them. But all this is irrelevant to our present purpose, which applies to the work, but not at all to the writers, excepting in so far as they (by whatever names known) were notoriously and demonstrably persons belonging to that era, trained in Roman habits of thinking, connected with the court, intimate with the great palatine officers, and therefore presumably men of rank and education. We rely, in so far as we rely at all upon this work, upon these two among its characteristic features: first, upon the quality and style of its biographic notices; secondly, upon the remarkable uncertainty which hangs over all lives a little removed from the personal cognizance or immediate era of the writer. But, as respects not the History, but the subjects of the

History, we rely, thirdly, upon the peculiar traits of feeling which gradually began to disfigure the ideal conception of the Roman Caesar in the minds of his subjects; fourthly, without reference to the *Augustan History*, or to the subjects of that History, we rely generally, for establishing the growing barbarism of Rome, upon the condition of the Roman literature after the period of the first twelve Caesars.

ANECDOTAGE

We infer the increasing barbarism of the Roman mind from the quality of the personal notices and portraitures exhibited throughout these biographical records. The whole may be described by one word—*Anecdote*. It is impossible to conceive the dignity of History more degraded than by the petty nature of the anecdotes which compose the bulk of the communications about every Caesar, good or bad, great or little. . . . In this strain—how truly worthy of the children of Romulus, how becoming to the descendants from Scipio Africanus, from Paulus Aemilius, from the colossal Marius and the godlike Julius—the whole of the *Augustan History* moves. There is a superb line in Lucan which represents the mighty phantom of Paulus standing at a banquet to reproach or to alarm:

Et Pauli ingentem stare miraberis umbram!

What a horror would have seized this Augustan scribbler, this Roman Tims, if he could have seen this "mighty phantom" at his elbow looking over his inanities, and what a horror would have seized the phantom! Once, in the course of his aulic memorabilia, the writer is struck with a sudden glimpse of such an idea, and he reproaches himself for recording such infinite littleness. After reporting some anecdotes, in the usual Augustan style, about an Imperial rebel, as, for instance, that he had ridden upon ostriches (which he says was the next thing to flying);

that he had eaten a dish of boiled hippopotamus;¹ and that, having a fancy for tickling the catastrophes of crocodiles, he had anointed himself with crocodile fat, by which means he humbugged the crocodiles, ceasing to be Caesar and passing for a crocodile, swimming and playing amongst them; these glorious facts being recorded, he goes on to say: "Sed haec scire quid prod-est? cum et Livius et Sallustius taceant res leves de iis quorum vitas scribendas arripuerint. Non enim scimus quales mulos Clodius habuerit; nec utrum Tusco equo sederit Catilina an Sardo; vel quali chlamyde Pompeius usus fuerit, an purpurâ." No, we do *not* know. Livy would have died "in the high Roman fashion" before he would have degraded himself by such babble of nursery-maids, or of palace pimps and eaves-droppers.

But it is too evident that babble of this kind grew up not by any accident, but as a natural growth, and by a sort of physical necessity, from the condition of the Roman mind after it had ceased to be excited by opposition in foreign nations. It was not merely the extinction of republican institutions which operated (that might operate as a co-cause); but, had these institutions even survived, the unresisted energies of the Roman mind, having no purchase, nothing to push against, would have collapsed. The eagle, of all birds, would be the first to flutter and sink plumb down, if the atmosphere should make no resistance to his wings. The first Roman of note who began this system of anecdotage was Suetonius. In him the poison of the degradation was much diluted by the strong remembrances, still surviving, of the mighty Republic. The glorious sunset was still burning with gold and orange lights in the west. True, the disease had commenced; but the habits of health were still strong for restraint and for conflict with its power. Besides that, Suetonius graces his minutiae and embalms them in amber by the exquisite

¹ "*Eaten a dish of boiled hippopotamus.*"—We once thought that some error might exist in the text—*edisse* for *edidisse*—and that a man exposed a hippopotamus at the games of the amphitheatre; but we are now satisfied that he ate the hippopotamus.

finish of his rhetoric. But his case, coming so early among the Caesarian annals, is sufficient to show that the growth of such history was a spontaneous growth from the circumstances of the empire, viz., from the total collapse of all public antagonism.

The next literature in which the spirit of anecdotage arose was that of France. From the age of Louis Treize, or perhaps of Henri Quatre, to the Revolution, this species of chamber-memoirs—this eavesdropping biography—prevailed so as to strangle authentic history. The parasitical plant absolutely killed the supporting tree. And one remark we will venture to make on that fact: the French Literature would have been killed, and the national mind reduced to the *strulbrug* condition, had it not been for the situation of France amongst other great kingdoms, making her liable to potent reactions from them. The Memoirs of France—that is, the *valet-de-chambre's* archives substituted for the statesman's, the ambassador's, the soldier's, the politician's—would have extinguished all other historic composition, as in fact they nearly did, but for the insulation of France amongst nations with more masculine habits of thought. That saved France. Rome had no such advantage; and Rome gave way. The props, the buttresses, of the Roman intellect were all cancered and honey-combed by this dry-rot in her political energies. One excuse there is: storms yield tragedies for the historian; the dead calms of a universal monarchy leave him little but personal memoranda. In such a case he is nothing if he is not anecdotal.

Secondly, we infer the barbarism of Rome, and the increasing barbarism, from the inconceivable ignorance which prevailed throughout the Western Empire as to the most interesting public facts that were not taken down on the spot by a *tachygraphus* or short-hand reporter. Let a few years pass, and everything was forgotten about everybody. Within a few years after the death of Aurelian, though a kind of saint amongst the armies and the populace of Rome (for to the Senate he

was odious), no person could tell who was the Emperor's mother, or where she lived; though she must have been a woman of station and notoriety in her lifetime, having been a high priestess at some temple unknown. Alexander Severus, a very interesting Caesar, who recalls to an Englishman the idea of his own Edward the Sixth, both as a prince equally amiable, equally disposed to piety, equally to reforms, and because, like Edward, he was so placed with respect to the succession and position of his reign, between unnatural monsters and bloody exterminators, as to reap all the benefit of contrast and soft relief; this Alexander was assassinated. That was of course. But, still, though the fact was of course, the motives often varied, and the circumstances varied; and the reader would be glad to know, in Shakspeare's language, "for which of his virtues" it was deemed requisite to murder him; as also, if it would not be too much trouble to the historian, who might be the murderers, and what might be their rank, and their names, and their recompense—whether a halter or a palace. But nothing of all this can be learned. And why? All had been forgotten.¹ Lethe had sent all her waves over the whole transaction; and the man who wrote within thirty years found no vestige recoverable of the imperial murder more than you or we, reader, would find at this day, if we should search for fragments of that imperial tent in which the murder happened. Again, with respect to the princes who succeeded immediately to their part of the *Augustan History* now surviving,—princes the

¹ "*All had been forgotten.*"—It is true that the Augustan writer, rather than appear to know nothing at all, tells a most idle fable about a *scurra* having intruded into Caesar's tent, and, upon finding the young Emperor awake, excited his comrades to the murder for fear of being punished for his insolent intrusion. But the whole story is nonsense—a camp legend, or, at the best, a fable put forth by the real conspirators to mask the truth. The writer did not believe it himself. By the way, a *scurra* does not retain its classical sense of a buffoon in the *Augustan History*; it means a *σωματοφύλαξ*, or bodyguard, but why is yet undiscovered. Our own belief is that the word is a Thracian or a Gothic word, the bodyguards being derived from those nations.

most remarkable, and *cardinal* to the movement of history, viz., Diocletian and Constantine—many of the weightiest transactions in their lives are washed out as by a sponge. Did Diocletian hang himself in his garters? or did he die in his bed? Nobody knows. And, if Diocletian hanged himself, why did Diocletian hang himself? Nobody can guess. Did Constantine, again, marry a second wife? Did this second wife fall in love with her stepson Crispus? Did she, in resentment of his scorn, bear false witness against him to his father? Did his father, in consequence, put him to death? What an awful domestic tragedy!—was it true? Nobody knows. On the one hand, Eusebius does not so much as allude to it; but, on the other hand, Eusebius had his golden reasons for favouring Constantine, and this was a matter to be hushed up rather than blazoned. Tell it not in Gath! Publish it not in Ascalon! Then, again, on the one hand, the tale seems absolutely a leaf torn out of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. It is the identical story, only the name is changed; Constantine is Theseus, his new wife is Phaedra, Crispus is Hippolytus. So far it seems rank with forgery. Yet, again, on the other hand, such a duplicate did *bonâ fide* occur in modern history. Such a domestic tragedy was actually rehearsed, with one unimportant change; such a leaf was positively torn out of Euripides. Philip II played the part of Theseus, Don Carlos the part of Hippolytus, and the Queen filled the situation (without the *animus*) of Phaedra. Again, therefore, one is reduced to blank ignorance, and the world will never know the true history of the Caesar who first gave an establishment and an earthly throne to Christianity, because history had slept the sleep of death before that Caesar's time, and because the great muse of history had descended from Parnassus, and was running about Caesar's palace in the bed-gown and slippers of a chambermaid.

Many hundreds of similar *lacunae* we could assign with regard to facts the most indispensable to be known; but we must hurry onwards. Meantime, let the reader contrast with this dearth of primary facts in the history

mind,—I presume that I may justly express the tendency of the *Paradise Lost*, by saying that it communicates power; a pretension far above all communication of knowledge. Henceforth, therefore, I shall use the anti-thesis power and knowledge as the most philosophical expression for literature (that is, *Literae Humaniores*) and anti-literature (that is, *Literae didacticae*—*Παιδεία*).

RHETORIC

[Rhetoric, for some reason, is regarded with extreme disfavour by most latter-day English critics; which is the more remarkable since some of the very greatest of English writers are nothing if not rhetorical. Milton and Byron, the only two of our poets besides Shakespeare who have gained a world-wide celebrity, are rhetorical poets; our rhetorical prose, Milton's, Bacon's, Jeremy Taylor's, Carlyle's, Ruskin's, De Quincey's own, is the noblest of its kind in modern literature. There is, of course, a true and a false rhetoric as there is a true and a false eloquence. The distinction is ably drawn in this Essay; which moreover is, in its best passages, a rich example of what De Quincey specifically meant by rhetoric—namely, the art of ornate and allusive prose, which depends for its effect not merely on lucid exposition and logical statement, but on illuminative fancy, imaginative illustration, and a wealth of verbal decoration. To read De Quincey's notices of his masters and teachers, the great rhetoricians of the seventeenth century, is to be convinced that English prose cannot for ever be denied its most characteristic quality in favour of a Gallic limpidity and thinness which may be suited to the Latin genius but is alien from our own.

The Essay was contributed to *Blackwood* in December 1828 as a review of Whateley's *Elements of Rhetoric*.]

WHATSOEVER is certain, or matter of fixed science, can be no subject for the rhetorician: where it is possible for the understanding to be convinced, no field is open for rhetorical persuasion. Absolute certainty and fixed science transcend opinion, and exclude the probable. The province of rhetoric, whether meant for an influence upon the actions, or simply upon the belief, lies amongst that vast field of cases where there is a *pro* and a *con*, with the chance of right and wrong, true and false, dis-

tributed in varying proportions between them. There is also an immense range of truths, where there are no chances at all concerned, but the affirmative and the negative are both true; as, for example, the goodness of human nature and its wickedness; the happiness of human life and its misery; the charms of knowledge, and its hollowness; the fragility of human prosperity, in the eye of religious meditation, and its security, as estimated by worldly confidence and youthful hope. In all such cases the rhetorician exhibits his art by giving an impulse to one side, and by withdrawing the mind so steadily from all thoughts or images which support the other, as to leave it practically under the possession of a one-sided estimate.

Upon this theory, what relation to rhetoric shall we assign to style and the ornamental arts of composition? In some respect they seem liable to the same objection as that which Aristotle has urged against appeals to the passions; both are extra-essential, or ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος; they are subjective arts, not objective; that is, they do not affect the thing which is to be surveyed, but the eye of him who is to survey. Yet, at a banquet, the epicure holds himself not more obliged to the cook for the venison, than to the physician who braces his stomach to enjoy. And any arts which conciliate regard to the speaker, indirectly promote the effect of his arguments. On this account, and because (under the severest limitation of rhetoric) they are in many cases indispensable to the perfect interpretation of the thoughts, we may admit arts of style and ornamental composition as the ministerial part of rhetoric. But with regard to the passions, as contended for by Dr. Campbell, it is a sufficient answer that they are already pre-occupied by what is called *Eloquence*.

Coleridge, as we have often heard, is in the habit of drawing the line with much philosophical beauty between rhetoric and eloquence. On this topic we were never so fortunate as to hear him: but if we are here called upon for a distinction, we shall satisfy our immediate purpose by a very plain and brief one. By Elo-

household gods, the majesty of the empire, the *sacramentum militare*, all had given way, all had yawned beneath his feet.

The imagination of man can frame nothing so awful—the experience of man has witnessed nothing so awful—as the situation and tenure of the Western Caesar. The danger which threatened him was like the pestilence which walketh in darkness, but which also walketh in noon-day. Morning and evening, summer and winter, brought no change or shadow of turning to this particular evil. In that respect it enjoyed the immunities of God; it was the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. After three centuries it had lost nothing of its virulence; it was growing worse continually; the heart of man ached under the evil, and the necessity of the evil. Can any man measure the sickening fear which must have possessed the hearts of the ladies and the children composing the imperial family? To them the mere terror, entailed like an inheritance of leprosy upon their family above all others, must have made it a woe like one of the evils in the Revelation—such in its infliction, such in its inevitability. It was what Pagan language denominated “a *sacred* danger,” a danger charmed and consecrated against human alleviation.

At length, but not until about three hundred and twenty years of murder had elapsed from the inaugural murder of the great imperial founder, Diocletian rose, and, as a last resource of despair, said, Let us multiply our image, and try if that will discourage our murderers. Like Kehama, entering the eight gates of Padalon at once, and facing himself eight times over, he appointed an assessor for himself; and, each of these co-ordinate Augusti having a subordinate Caesar, there were in fact four co-eval Emperors. Caesar enjoyed a perfect *alibi*: like the royal ghost in *Hamlet*, Caesar was *hic et ubique*. And unless treason enjoyed the same ubiquity, now, at least, one would have expected that Caesar might sleep in security. But murder—imperial murder—is a Briareus. There was a curse upon the throne of Western Rome: it rocked like the sea, and for some mysterious reason

could not find rest; and few princes were more memorably afflicted than the immediate successors to this arrangement.

A nation living in the bosom of these funereal convulsions, this endless billowy oscillation of prosperous murder and thrones overturned, could not have been moral, and therefore could not have reached a high civilization had other influences favoured. No causes act so fatally on public morality as convulsions in the state. And against Rome all other influences combined. It was a period of awful transition. It was a period of tremendous conflict between all false religions in the world (for thirty thousand gods were worshipped in Rome) and a religion too pure to be comprehended. That light could not be comprehended by that darkness. And, in strict philosophic truth, Christianity did not reach its mature period, even of infancy, until the days of the Protestant Reformation. In Rome it has always blended with Paganism; it does so to this day. But *then, i.e.*, up to Diocletian (or the period of the *Augustan History*), even that sort of Christianity, even this foul adulteration of Christianity, had no national influence. Even a pure and holy religion therefore, by arraying demoniac passions on the side of Paganism, contributed to the barbarizing of Western Rome.

Finally, we infer the barbarism of Rome from the condition of her current literature. Anything more contemptible than the literature of Western (or indeed of Eastern) Rome after Trajan, it is not possible to conceive. Claudian, and two or three others, about the times of Carinus, are the sole writers in verse through a period of four centuries. Writers in prose there are none after Tacitus and the younger Pliny. Nor in Greek literature is there one man of genius after Plutarch, excepting Lucian. As to Libanius, he would have been "a decent priest where monkeys are the gods;" and he was worthy to fumigate with his leaden censer, and with incense from such dull weeds as root themselves in Lethe, that earthly idol of modern infidels—the shallow,

but at the same time stupid, Julian. Upon this subject, however, we may have two summary observations to make: first, it is a fatal ignorance in disputing, and has lost many a good cause, not to perceive on which side rests the *onus* of proof. Here, because on our allegation the proposition to be proved would be negative, the *onus probandi* must lie with our opponents; for we peremptorily affirm that from Trajan downwards there was no literature in Rome. To prove a negative is impossible; but any opponent who takes the affirmative side and says there *was* will find it easy to refute us. Only be it remembered that one swallow does not make a summer. Secondly (which, if true, ought to make all writers on general literature ashamed), we maintain that in any one period of sixty years in any one of those centuries which we call so familiarly the Dark Ages (yes, even in the tenth or eleventh), we engage to name more and better books as the product of the period given than were produced in the whole 350 years from Trajan to Honorius and Attila. Here, therefore, is at once a great cause, a great effect, and a great exponent of the barbarism which had overshadowed the Western Empire before either Goth or Vandal had gained a settlement in the land. The quality of their history, the tenure of the Caesars, the total abolition of literature, and the convulsion of public morals—these were the true key to the Roman decay.

JOAN OF ARC

[To the literature of power most unmistakably belongs another of the essays which must be classed as historical or biographical, that on Joan of Arc. De Quincey's sensibilities were deeply touched by the Maid of France, and he consecrates to her one of the most emotional and carefully elaborated of his prose lyrics. The essay appeared in *Tait's Magazine* in March and August, 1847, and was written, according to its author, to vindicate Jeanne from the aspersions of the Revolutionary writers and the grudging appreciation of Michelet.]

WHAT is to be thought of *her*? What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of

Lorraine, that—like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judaea—rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings? The Hebrew boy inaugurated his patriotic mission by an *act*, by a victorious *act*, such as no man could deny. But so did the girl of Lorraine, if we read her story as it was read by those who saw her nearest. Adverse armies bore witness to the boy as no pretender; but so they did to the gentle girl. Judged by the voices of all who saw them *from a station of good-will*, both were found true and loyal to any promises involved in their first acts. Enemies it was that made the difference between their subsequent fortunes. The boy rose to a splendour and a noonday prosperity, both personal and public, that rang through the records of his people, and became a by-word amongst his posterity for a thousand years, until the sceptre was departing from Judah. The poor, forsaken girl, on the contrary, drank not herself from that cup of rest which she had secured for France. She never sang together with the songs that rose in her native Domrémy, as echoes to the departing steps of invaders. She mingled not in the festal dances at Vaucouleurs which celebrated in rapture the redemption of France. No! for her voice was then silent; no! for her feet were dust. Pure, innocent, noble-hearted girl! whom, from earliest youth, ever I believed in as full of truth and self-sacrifice, this was amongst the strongest pledges for *thy* truth, that never once—no, not for a moment of weakness—didst thou revel in the vision of coronets and honour from man. Coronets for thee! Oh no! Honours, if they come when all is over, are for those that share thy blood.¹ Daughter of Domrémy, when the gratitude of thy king shall awaken, thou wilt be sleeping the sleep of the dead. Call her, King of France, but she will not hear thee! Cite her by thy apparitors to come and receive a robe of honour, but she will be found

¹ “*Those that share thy blood:*”—A collateral relative of Joanna’s was subsequently ennobled by the title of *Du Lys*.

en contumace. When the thunders of universal France, as even yet may happen, shall proclaim the grandeur of the poor shepherd girl that gave up all for her country, thy ear, young shepherd girl, will have been deaf for five centuries. To suffer and to do, that was thy portion in this life; that was thy destiny; and not for a moment was it hidden from thyself. Life, thou saidst, is short; and the sleep which is in the grave is long! Let me use that life, so transitory, for the glory of those heavenly dreams destined to comfort the sleep which is so long. This pure creature—pure from every suspicion of even a visionary self-interest, even as she was pure in senses more obvious—never once did this holy child, as regarded herself, relax from her belief in the darkness that was travelling to meet her. She might not prefigure the very manner of her death; she saw not in vision, perhaps, the aerial altitude of the fiery scaffold, the spectators without end on every road pouring into Rouen as to a coronation, the surging smoke, the volleying flames, the hostile faces all around, the pitying eye that lurked but here and there, until nature and imperishable truth broke loose from artificial restraints;—these might not be apparent through the mists of the hurrying future. But the voice that called her to death, *that* she heard for ever.

Great was the throne of France even in those days, and great was he that sat upon it: but well Joanna knew that not the throne, nor he that sat upon it, was for *her*; but, on the contrary, that she was for *them*; not she by them, but they by her, should rise from the dust. Gorgeous were the lilies of France, and for centuries had the privilege to spread their beauty over land and sea, until, in another century, the wrath of God and man combined to wither them; but well Joanna knew, early at Domrémy she had read that bitter truth, that the lilies of France would decorate no garland for *her*. Flower nor bud, bell nor blossom, would ever bloom for *her*.

* * * * *

The education of this poor girl was mean according

to the present standard: was ineffably grand, according to a purer philosophic standard: and only not good for our age, because for us it would be unattainable. She read nothing, for she could not read; but she had heard others read parts of the Roman martyrology. She wept in sympathy with the sad *Misereres* of the Romish Church; she rose to heaven with the glad triumphant *Te Deums* of Rome: she drew her comfort and her vital strength from the rites of the same church. But, next after these spiritual advantages, she owed most to the advantages of her situation. The fountain of Domrémy was on the brink of a boundless forest; and it was haunted to that degree by fairies, that the parish priest (*cure*) was obliged to read mass there once a-year, in order to keep them in any decent bounds. Fairies are important, even in a statistical view: certain weeds mark poverty in the soil, fairies mark its solitude. As surely as the wolf retires before cities, does the fairy sequester herself from the haunts of the licensed victualler. A village is too much for her nervous delicacy: at most, she can tolerate a distant view of a hamlet. We may judge, therefore, by the uneasiness and extra trouble which they gave to the parson, in what strength the fairies mustered at Domrémy; and, by a satisfactory consequence, how thinly sown with men and women must have been that region even in its inhabited spots.

But the forests of Domrémy—those were the glories of the land: for in them abode mysterious powers and ancient secrets that towered into tragic strength. “Abbeys there were, and abbey windows,”—“like Moorish temples of the Hindoos,” that exercised even princely power both in Lorraine and in the German Diets. These had their sweet bells that pierced the forests for many a league at matins or vespers, and each its own dreamy legend. Few enough, and scattered enough, were these abbeys, so as in no degree to disturb the deep solitude of the region; yet many enough to spread a network or awning of Christian sanctity over what else might have seemed a heathen wilderness. This sort of religious talisman being secured, a man the most afraid of ghosts

(like myself, suppose, or the reader) becomes armed into courage to wander for days in their sylvan recesses.

The mountains of the Vosges, on the eastern frontier of France, have never attracted much notice from Europe, except in 1813-14 for a few brief months, when they fell within Napoleon's line of defence against the Allies. But they are interesting for this, amongst other features, that they do not, like some loftier ranges, repel woods: the forests and the hills are on sociable terms. *Live and let live*, is their motto. For this reason, in part, these tracts in Lorraine were a favourite hunting-ground with the Carlovingian princes. About six hundred years before Joanna's childhood, Charlemagne was known to have hunted there. That, of itself, was a grand incident in the traditions of a forest or a chase. In these vast forests, also, were to be found (if anywhere to be found) those mysterious fawns that tempted solitary hunters into visionary and perilous pursuits. Here was seen (if anywhere seen) that ancient stag who was already nine hundred years old, but possibly a hundred or two more, when met by Charlemagne; and the thing was put beyond doubt by the inscription upon his golden collar. . . .

But, apart from all distinct stories of that order, in any solitary frontier between two great empires, as here, for instance, or in the desert between Syria and the Euphrates, there is an inevitable tendency, in minds of any deep sensibility, to people the solitudes with phantom images of powers that were of old so vast. Joanna, therefore, in her quiet occupation of a shepherdess, would be led continually to brood over the political condition of her country, by the traditions of the past no less than by the mementoes of the local present.

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But she, the child that, at nineteen, had wrought wonders so great for France, was she not elated? Did she not lose, as men so often *have* lost, all sobriety of mind when standing upon the pinnacle of success so giddy? Let her enemies declare. During the progress of her movement, and in the centre of ferocious struggles,

she had manifested the temper of her feelings, by the pity which she had everywhere expressed for the suffering enemy. She forwarded to the English leaders a touching invitation to unite with the French, as brothers, in a common crusade against infidels, thus opening the road for a soldierly retreat. She interposed to protect the captive or the wounded—she mourned over the excesses of her countrymen—she threw herself off her horse to kneel by the dying English soldier, and to comfort him with such ministrations, physical or spiritual, as his situation allowed. “Nolebat,” says the evidence, “uti ense suo, aut quemquam interficere.” She sheltered the English, that invoked her aid, in her own quarters. She wept as she beheld, stretched on the field of battle, so many brave enemies that had died without confession.

And, as regarded herself, her elation expressed itself thus: On the day when she had finished her work, she wept; for she knew that, when her *triumphal* task was done, her end must be approaching. Her aspirations pointed only to a place, which seemed to her more than usually full of natural piety, as one in which it would give her pleasure to die. And she uttered, between smiles and tears, as a wish that inexpressibly fascinated her heart, and yet was half-fantastic, a broken prayer that God would return her to the solitudes from which he had drawn her, and suffer her to become a shepherdess once more. It was a natural prayer, because nature has laid a necessity upon every human heart to seek for rest, and to shrink from torment. Yet, again, it was a half-fantastic prayer, because, from childhood upwards, visions that she had no power to mistrust, and the voices which sounded in her ear for ever, had long since persuaded her mind, that for *her* no such prayer could be granted. Too well she felt that her mission must be worked out to the end, and that the end was now at hand. All went wrong from this time. She herself had created the *funds* out of which the French restoration should grow; but she was not suffered to witness their development, or their prosperous application. More than one military plan was entered upon

which she did not approve. But she still continued to expose her person as before. Severe wounds had not taught her caution. And at length, in a sortie from Compiègne (whether through treacherous collusion on the part of her own friends is doubtful to this day), she was made prisoner by the Burgundians, and finally surrendered to the English.

Now came her trial. This trial, moving of course under English influence, was conducted in chief by the Bishop of Beauvais. He was a Frenchman, sold to English interests, and hoping, by favour of the English leaders, to reach the highest preferment. *Bishop that art, Archbishop that shalt be, Cardinal that mayest be,* were the words that sounded continually in his ear; and doubtless a whisper of visions still higher, of a triple crown, and feet upon the necks of kings, sometimes stole into his heart. M. Michelet is anxious to keep us in mind that this bishop was but an agent of the English. True. But it does not better the case for his countryman—that, being an accomplice in the crime, making himself the leader in the persecution against the helpless girl, he was willing to be all this in the spirit, and with the conscious vileness of a cat's-paw.

Never from the foundations of the earth was there such a trial as this, if it were laid open in all its beauty of defence, and all its hellishness of attack. Oh, child of France! shepherdess, peasant girl! trodden under foot by all around thee, how I honour thy flashing intellect, quick as God's lightning; and true as God's lightning to its mark, that ran before France and laggard Europe by many a century, confounding the malice of the ensnarer, and making dumb the oracles of falsehood! Is it not scandalous, is it not humiliating to civilization, that, even at this day, France exhibits the horrid spectacle of judges examining the prisoner against himself; seducing him, by fraud, into treacherous conclusions against his own head; using the terrors of their power for extorting confessions from the frailty of hope; nay (which is worse), using the blandishments of condescension and snaky kindness for thawing into compliances of gratitude

those whom they had failed to freeze into terror? Wicked judges! Barbarian jurisprudence! that, sitting in your own conceit on the summits of social wisdom, have yet failed to learn the first principles of criminal justice; sit ye humbly and with docility at the feet of this girl from Domrémy, that tore your webs of cruelty into shreds and dust. "Would you examine me as a witness against myself?" was the question by which many times she defied their arts. Continually she showed that their interrogations were irrelevant to any business before the court, or that entered into the ridiculous charges against her.

General questions were proposed to her on points of casuistical divinity; two-edged questions, which not one of themselves could have answered, without, on the one side, landing himself in heresy (as then interpreted), or, on the other, in some presumptuous expression of self-esteem. Next came a wretched Dominican, that pressed her with an objection, which, if applied to the Bible, would tax every one of its miracles with unsoundness. . . .

Her answer to this, if there were room to place the whole in a clear light, was as shattering as it was rapid. Another thought to entrap her by asking what language the angelic visitors of her solitude had talked; as though heavenly counsels could want polyglot interpreters for every word, or that God needed language at all in whispering thoughts to a human heart. Then came a worse devil, who asked her whether the archangel Michael had appeared naked. Not comprehending the vile insinuation, Joanna, whose poverty suggested to her simplicity that it might be the *costliness* of suitable robes which caused the demur, asked them if they fancied God, who clothed the flowers of the valleys, unable to find raiment for his servants. The answer of Joanna moves a smile of tenderness, but the disappointment of her judges makes one laugh exultingly. Others succeeded by troops, who upbraided her with leaving her father; as if that greater Father, whom she believed herself to have been serving, did not retain the power of dispensing with his

own rules, or had not said, that for a less cause than martyrdom, man and woman should leave both father and mother.

On Easter Sunday, when the trial had been long proceeding, the poor girl fell so ill as to cause a belief that she had been poisoned. It was not poison. Nobody had any interest in hastening a death so certain. M. Michelet, whose sympathies with all feelings are so quick, that one would gladly see them always as justly directed, reads the case most truly. Joanna had a two-fold malady. She was visited by a paroxysm of the complaint called *home-sickness*; the cruel nature of her imprisonment, and its length, could not but point her solitary thoughts, in darkness and in chains (for chained she was), to Domrémy. And the season, which was the most heavenly period of the spring, added stings to this yearning. That was one of her maladies—*nostalgia*, as medicine calls it; the other was weariness and exhaustion from daily combats with malice. She saw that everybody hated her, and thirsted for her blood; nay, many kind-hearted creatures that would have pitied her profoundly, as regarded all political charges, had their natural feelings warped by the belief that she had dealings with fiendish powers. She knew she was to die; that was *not* the misery: the misery was, that this consummation could not be reached without so much intermediate strife, as if she were contending for some chance (where chance was none) of happiness, or were dreaming for a moment of escaping the inevitable. Why, then, *did* she contend? Knowing that she would reap nothing from answering her persecutors, why did she not retire by silence from the superfluous contest? It was because her quick and eager loyalty to truth would not suffer her to see it darkened by frauds, which *she* could expose, but others, even of candid listeners, perhaps, could not; it was through that imperishable grandeur of soul, which taught her to submit meekly and without a struggle to her punishment, but taught her *not* to submit—no, not for a moment—to calumny as to facts, or to misconstruction as to motives. Besides, there were secretaries

all around the court taking down her words. That was meant for no good to *her*. But the end does not always correspond to the meaning. And Joanna might say to herself—these words that will be used against me to-morrow and the next day, perhaps in some nobler generation may rise again for my justification. Yes, Joanna, they *are* rising even now in Paris, and for more than justification.

Woman, sister—there are some things which you do not execute as well as your brother, man; no, nor ever will. Pardon me, if I doubt whether you will ever produce a great poet from your choirs, or a Mozart, or a Phidias, or a Michael Angelo, or a great philosopher, or a great scholar. By which last is meant—not one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite and electrical power of combination; bringing together from the four winds, like the angel of the resurrection, what else were dust from dead men's bones, into the unity of breathing life. If you *can* create yourselves into any of these great creators, why have you not?

Yet, sister woman, though I cannot consent to find a Mozart or a Michael Angelo in your sex, cheerfully, and with the love that burns in depths of admiration, I acknowledge that you can do one thing as well as the best of us men—a greater thing than even Milton is known to have done, or Michael Angelo—you can die grandly, and as goddesses would die, were goddesses mortal. If any distant worlds (which *may* be the case) are so far ahead of us Tellurians in optical resources, as to see distinctly through their telescopes all that we do on earth, what is the grandest sight to which we ever treat them? St. Peter's at Rome, do you fancy, on Easter Sunday, or Luxor, or perhaps the Himalayas? Oh no! my friend: suggest something better; these are baubles to *them*; they see in other worlds, in their own, far better toys of the same kind. These, take my word for it, are nothing. Do you give it up? The finest thing, then, we have to show them is a scaffold on the morning of execution. I assure you there is a strong muster

in those far telescopic worlds, on any such morning, of those who happen to find themselves occupying the right hemisphere for a peep at us. How, then, if it be announced in some such telescopic world by those who make a livelihood of catching glimpses at our newspapers, whose language they have long since deciphered, that the poor victim in the morning's sacrifice is a woman? How, if it be published in that distant world, that the sufferer wears upon her head, in the eyes of many, the garlands of martyrdom? How, if it should be some Marie Antoinette, the widowed queen, coming forward on the scaffold, and presenting to the morning air her head, turned grey by sorrow, daughter of Caesars kneeling down humbly to kiss the guillotine, as one that worships death? How, if it were the noble Charlotte Corday, that in the bloom of youth, that with the loveliest of persons, that with homage waiting upon her smiles wherever she turned her face to scatter them—homage that followed those smiles as surely as the carols of birds, after showers in spring, follow the re-appearing sun and the racing of sunbeams over the hills—yet thought all these things cheaper than the dust upon her sandals, in comparison of deliverance from hell for her dear suffering France! Ah! these were spectacles indeed for those sympathizing people in distant worlds; and some, perhaps, would suffer a sort of martyrdom themselves, because they could not testify their wrath, could not bear witness to the strength of love and to the fury of hatred that burned within them at such scenes; could not gather into golden urns some of that glorious dust which rested in the catacombs of earth.

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Bishop of Beauvais! thy victim died in fire upon a scaffold—thou upon a down bed. But for the departing minutes of life, both are oftentimes alike. At the farewell crisis, when the gates of death are opening, and flesh is resting from its struggles, oftentimes the tortured and the torturer have the same truce from carnal torment; both sink together into sleep; together both

sometimes kindle into dreams. When the mortal mists were gathering fast upon you two, bishop and shepherd girl—when the pavilions of life were closing up their shadowy curtains about you—let us try, through the gigantic glooms, to decipher the flying features of your separate visions.

The shepherd girl that had delivered France—she, from her dungeon, she, from her baiting at the stake, she, from her duel with fire, as she entered her last dream—saw Domrémy, saw the fountain of Domrémy, saw the pomp of forests in which her childhood had wandered. That Easter festival, which man had denied to her languishing heart—that resurrection of spring-time, which the darkness of dungeons had intercepted from *her*, hungering after the glorious liberty of forests—were by God given back into her hands, as jewels that had been stolen from her by robbers. With those, perhaps (for the minutes of dreams can stretch into ages), was given back to her by God the bliss of childhood. By special privilege, for *her* might be created, in this farewell dream, a second childhood, innocent as the first; but not, like *that*, sad with the gloom of a fearful mission in the rear. This mission had now been fulfilled. The storm was weathered, the skirts even of that mighty storm were drawing off. The blood that she was to reckon for had been exacted; the tears that she was to shed in secret had been paid to the last. The hatred to herself in all eyes had been faced steadily, had been suffered, had been survived. And in her last fight upon the scaffold she had triumphed gloriously; victoriously she had tasted the stings of death. For all, except this comfort from her farewell dream, she had died—died, amidst the tears of ten thousand enemies—died, amidst the drums and trumpets of armies—died, amidst peals redoubling upon peals, volleys upon volleys, from the saluting clarions of martyrs.

Bishop of Beauvais! because the guilt-burdened man is in dreams haunted and waylaid by the most frightful of his crimes, and because upon that fluctuating mirror—rising (like the mocking mirrors of *mirage* in Arabian

deserts) from the fens of death—most of all are reflected the sweet countenances which the man has laid in ruins; therefore I know, bishop, that you also, entering your final dream, saw Domrémy. That fountain, of which the witnesses spoke so much, showed itself to your eyes in pure morning dews: but neither dews, nor the holy dawn, could cleanse away the bright spots of innocent blood upon its surface. By the fountain, bishop, you saw a woman seated, that hid her face. But as *you* draw near, the woman raises her wasted features. Would Domrémy know them again for the features of her child? Ah, but *you* know them, bishop, well! Oh, mercy! what a groan was *that* which the servants, waiting outside the bishop's dream at his bedside, heard from his labouring heart, as at this moment he turned away from the fountain and the woman, seeking rest in the forests afar off. Yet not *so* to escape the woman, whom once again he must behold before he dies. In the forests to which he prays for pity, will he find a respite? What a tumult, what a gathering of feet is there! In glades, where only wild deer should run, armies and nations are assembling; towering in the fluctuating crowd are phantoms that belong to departed hours. There is the great English Prince, Regent of France. There is my Lord of Winchester, the princely cardinal, that died and made no sign. There is the Bishop of Beauvais, clinging to the shelter of thickets. What building is that which hands so rapid are raising? Is it a martyr's scaffold? Will they burn the child of Domrémy a second time? No: it is a tribunal that rises to the clouds; and two nations stand around it, waiting for a trial. Shall my Lord of Beauvais sit again upon the judgment-seat, and again number the hours for the innocent? Ah no! he is the prisoner at the bar. Already all is waiting: the mighty audience is gathered, the Court is hurrying to their seats, the witnesses are arrayed, the trumpets are sounding, the judge is taking his place. Oh! but this is sudden. My lord, have you no counsel? "Counsel I have none: in heaven above, or on earth beneath, counsellor there is none now that would take a brief

from *me*: all are silent." Is it, indeed, come to this? Alas! the time is short, the tumult is wondrous, the crowd stretches away into infinity, but yet I will search in it for somebody to take your brief: I know of somebody that will be your counsel. Who is this that cometh from Domrémy? Who is she in bloody coronation robes from Rheims? Who is she that cometh with blackened flesh from walking the furnaces of Rouen? This is she, the shepherd girl, counsellor that had none for herself, whom I choose, bishop, for yours. She it is, I engage, that shall take my lord's brief. She it is, bishop, that would plead for you: yes, bishop, SHE—when heaven and earth are silent.

SATIRE

ON MURDER, CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS

[Next to the *Confessions* the satirical piece with this heading is the best known of De Quincey's writings. It gives him a definite claim to a place among the English humourists, though humour and pathos are scattered up and down all his writings. In this "murder" series De Quincey, as he pointed out himself, was pursuing the same vein of extravagant satire, or ironical burlesque, which Swift had tapped in his "Modest Proposal" for the cooking and eating of superfluous Irish children. But while the crude and savage plainness of the Dean's manner makes his jest inhuman, De Quincey is easy and playful throughout, and never allows us to forget that his rather horrible text is only the excuse for a grotesque extravaganza. You rise from the "Modest Proposal" with a shudder, from *Murder as a Fine Art* with a hearty and unforced laughter. Besides, as De Quincey has also observed, the cooking and eating of babies is not an obvious subject of human contemplation: our thoughts do not naturally turn to infants as articles of diet. Whereas murder is a theme of the profoundest intellectual interest, quite apart from its horror; as long as man's blood is shed by man the mind will ponder over the methods, the circumstances, the scenical accessories, of the crime. De Quincey's solemn irony had here a foundation, as all irony, all humour should have, in something that is large, elemental, profound, rooted in the depths of our nature.

The "murder" essays must be read *in extenso*, for it is difficult to convey their elaborate parody, and mock seriousness of argument, and the rollicking humour to which they work up at the close, by means of extracts. The papers are here given from De Quincey's revised reprint in the Collective Edition of the two chapters which appeared originally in *Blackwood* for February 1827, and November 1839.]

ADVERTISEMENT OF A MAN MORBIDLY VIRTUOUS

MOST of us, who read books, have probably heard of a Society for the Promotion of Vice, of the Hell-Fire

Club, founded in the last century by Sir Francis Dashwood, etc. At Brighton I think it was, that a Society was formed for the Suppression of Virtue. That society was itself suppressed; but I am sorry to say that another exists in London, of a character still more atrocious. Intendency, it may be denominated a Society for the Encouragement of Murder; but, according to their own delicate *εὐφημισμὸς*, it is styled, The Society of Connoisseurs in Murder. They profess to be curious in homicide; amateurs and dilettanti in the various modes of carnage; and, in short, Murder-Fanciers. Every fresh atrocity of that class which the police annals of Europe bring up, they meet and criticize as they would a picture, statue, or other work of art. But I need not trouble myself with any attempt to describe the spirit of their proceedings, as the reader will collect *that* much better from one of the Monthly Lectures read before the society last year. This has fallen into my hands accidentally, in spite of all the vigilance exercised to keep their transactions from the public eye. The publication of it will alarm them; and my purpose is, that it should. For I would much rather put them down quietly, by an appeal to public opinion, than by such an exposure of names as would follow an appeal to Bow Street; which last appeal, however, if this should fail, I must really resort to. For my intense virtue will not put up with such things in a Christian land. Even in a heathen land, the toleration of murder—viz., in the dreadful shows of the amphitheatre—was felt by a Christian writer to be the most crying reproach of the public morals. This writer was Lactantius; and with his words, as singularly applicable to the present occasion, I shall conclude:—“*Quid tam horribile,*” says he, “*tam tetrum, quam hominis trucidatio? Ideo severissimis legibus vita nostra munitur; ideo bella execrabilia sunt. Invenit tamen consuetudo quatenus homicidium sine bello ac sine legibus faciat: et hoc sibi voluptas quod scelus vindicavit. Quod si interesse homicidio sceleris conscientia est,—et eidem facinori spectator obstrictus est cui et admissor; ergo et in his gladiatorum caedibus*

non minus cruore profunditur qui spectat, quam ille qui facit: nec potest esse immunis a sanguine qui voluit effundi; aut videri non interfecisse, qui interfectori et favit et proemium postulavit." "What is so dreadful," says Lactantius, "what so dismal and revolting, as the murder of a human creature? Therefore it is, that life for us is protected by laws the most rigorous: therefore it is, that wars are objects of execration. And yet the traditional usage of Rome has devised a mode of authorizing murder apart from war, and in defiance of law; and the demands of taste (*voluptas*) are now become the same as those of abandoned guilt." Let the Society of Gentlemen Amateurs consider this; and let me call their especial attention to the last sentence, which is so weighty, that I shall attempt to convey it in English: "Now, if merely to be present at a murder fastens on a man the character of an accomplice; if barely to be a spectator involves us in one common guilt with the perpetrator, it follows, of necessity, that, in these murders of the amphitheatre, the hand which inflicts the fatal blow is not more deeply imbrued in blood than his who passively looks on; neither can he be clear of blood who has countenanced its shedding; nor that man seem other than a participator in murder, who gives his applause to the murderer, and calls for prizes on his behalf." The "*proemia postulavit*" I have not yet heard charged upon the Gentlemen Amateurs of London, though undoubtedly their proceedings tend to that; but the "*interfectori favit*" is implied in the very title of this association, and expressed in every line of the lecture which follows.

X. Y. Z.

LECTURE

GENTLEMEN,—I have had the honour to be appointed by your committee to the trying task of reading the Williams' Lecture on Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts; a task which might be easy enough three or

four centuries ago, when the art was little understood, and few great models had been exhibited; but in this age, when masterpieces of excellence have been executed by professional men, it must be evident, that in the style of criticism applied to them, the public will look for something of a corresponding improvement. Practice and theory must advance *pari passu*. People begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed—a knife—a purse—and a dark lane. Design, gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature. Mr. Williams has exalted the ideal of murder to all of us;¹ and to me, therefore, in particular, has deepened the arduousness of my task. Like Æschylus or Milton in poetry, like Michael Angelo in painting, he has carried his art to a point of colossal sublimity; and, as Mr. Wordsworth observes, has in a manner “created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.” To sketch the history of the art, and to examine its principles critically, now remains as a duty for the connoisseur, and for judges of quite another stamp from his Majesty’s Judges of Assize.

Before I begin, let me say a word or two to certain prigs, who affect to speak of our society as if it were in some degree immoral in its tendency. Immoral! Jupiter protect me, gentlemen, what is it that people mean? I am for morality, and always shall be, and for virtue, and all that; and I do affirm, and always shall (let what will come of it) that murder is an improper line of conduct, highly improper; and I do not stick to assert, that any man who deals in murder, must have very incorrect ways of thinking, and truly inaccurate principles; and

¹ [John Williams murdered the occupants of two houses (those of Mr. Marr and Mr. Williamson) in Ratcliffe Highway in December 1811. After the second murder he was captured, and committed suicide in prison. A circumstantial account of Williams’s crimes is given by De Quincey in a long Postscript which he appended to this Essay when he reprinted it in the Collective Edition of his writings.—S. L.]

so far from aiding and abetting him by pointing out his victim's hiding-place, as a great moralist¹ of Germany declared it to be every good man's duty to do, I would subscribe one shilling and sixpence to have him apprehended, which is more by eighteenpence than the most eminent moralists have hitherto subscribed for that purpose. But what then? Everything in this world has two handles. Murder, for instance, may be laid hold of by its moral handle (as it generally is in the pulpit, and at the Old Bailey); and *that*, I confess, is its weak side; or it may also be treated *aesthetically*, as the Germans call it—that is, in relation to good taste.

To illustrate this, I will urge the authority of three eminent persons; viz., S. T. Coleridge, Aristotle, and Mr. Howship the surgeon. To begin with S. T. C. One night, many years ago, I was drinking tea with him in Berners Street (which, by the way, for a short street, has been uncommonly fruitful in men of genius). Others were there besides myself; and, amidst some carnal considerations of tea and toast, we were all imbibing a dissertation on Plotinus from the Attic lips of S. T. C. Suddenly a cry arose of, "*Fire—fire!*" upon which all of us, master and disciples, Plato and οἱ περὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα, rushed out, eager for the spectacle. The fire was in Oxford Street, at a pianoforte-maker's; and, as it promised to be a conflagration of merit, I was sorry that my engagements forced me away from Mr. Coleridge's party, before matters had come to a crisis. Some days after, meeting with my Platonic host, I reminded him of the case, and begged to know how that very promising exhibition had terminated. "Oh, sir," said he, "it

¹ Kant—who carried his demands of unconditional veracity to so extravagant a length as to affirm, that, if a man were to see an innocent person escape from a murderer, it would be his duty, on being questioned by the murderer, to tell the truth, and to point out the retreat of the innocent person, under any certainty of causing murder. Lest this doctrine should be supposed to have escaped him in any heat of dispute, on being taxed with it by a celebrated French writer, he solemnly re-affirmed it, with his reasons.

turned out so ill that we damned it unanimously." Now, does any man suppose that Mr. Coleridge—who, for all he is too fat to be a person of active virtue, is undoubtedly a worthy Christian—that this good S. T. C., I say, was an incendiary, or capable of wishing any ill to the poor man and his pianofortes (many of them, doubtless, with the additional keys)? On the contrary, I know him to be that sort of man, that I durst stake my life upon it, he would have worked an engine in a case of necessity, although rather of the fattest for such fiery trials of his virtue. But how stood the case? Virtue was in no request. On the arrival of the fire engines, morality had devolved wholly on the insurance office. This being the case, he had a right to gratify his taste. He had left his tea. Was he to have nothing in return?

I contend that the most virtuous man, under the premises stated, was entitled to make a luxury of the fire, and to hiss it, as he would any other performance that raised expectations in the public mind which afterwards it disappointed. Again, to cite another great authority, what says the Stagirite? He (in the Fifth Book, I think it is, of his *Metaphysics*) describes what he calls *κλεπτήν τέλειον*—i.e., a *perfect thief*; and, as to Mr. Howship, in a work of his on Indigestion, he makes no scruple to talk with admiration of a certain ulcer which he had seen, and which he styles "a beautiful ulcer." Now, will any man pretend, that, abstractedly considered, a thief could appear to Aristotle a perfect character, or that Mr. Howship could be enamoured of an ulcer? Aristotle, it is well known, was himself so very moral a character, that, not content with writing his *Nicomachean Ethics*, in one volume octavo, he also wrote another system, called *Magna Moralia*, or Big Ethics. Now, it is impossible that a man who composes any ethics at all, big or little, should admire a thief *per se*; and as to Mr. Howship, it is well known that he makes war upon all ulcers, and, without suffering himself to be seduced by their charms, endeavours to banish them from the County of Middlesex. But the truth is, that, however objectionable *per se*, yet, relatively to others of

their class, both a thief and an ulcer may have infinite degrees of merit. They are both imperfections, it is true; but, to be imperfect being their essence, the very greatness of their imperfection becomes their perfection. *Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna.* A thief like Autolycus or the once famous George Barrington, and a grim phagedænic ulcer, superbly defined, and running regularly through all its natural stages, may no less justly be regarded as ideals after *their* kind, than the most faultless moss-rose amongst flowers, in its progress from bud to "bright consummate flower;" or, amongst human flowers, the most magnificent young female, appalled in the pomp of womanhood. And thus not only the ideal of an inkstand may be imagined (as Mr. Coleridge illustrated in his celebrated correspondence with Mr. Blackwood), in which, by the way, there is not so much, because an inkstand is a laudable sort of thing, and a valuable member of society; but even imperfection itself may have its ideal or perfect state.

Really, gentlemen, I beg pardon for so much philosophy at one time; and now let me apply it. When a murder is in the paulo-post-futurum tense—not done, not even (according to modern purism) *being done*, but only going to be done—and a rumour of it comes to our ears, by all means let us treat it morally. But suppose it over and done, and that you can say of it, *τετέλεσται*, It is finished, or (in that adamantine molossus of Medæa) *εἰργασται*, Done it is: it is a *fait accompli*; suppose the poor murdered man to be out of his pain, and the rascal that did it off like a shot, nobody knows whither; suppose, lastly, that we have done our best, by putting out our legs, to trip up the fellow in his flight, but all to no purpose—"abiit, evasit, excessit, erupit," etc.—why, then, I say, what's the use of any more virtue? Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and the Fine Arts. A sad thing it was, no doubt, very sad; but *we* can't mend it. Therefore let us make the best of a bad matter; and, as it is impossible to hammer anything out of it for moral purposes, let us treat it aesthetically, and see if it will turn to account in

that way. Such is the logic of a sensible man, and what follows? We dry up our tears, and have the satisfaction, perhaps, to discover that a transaction, which, morally considered, was shocking, and without a leg to stand upon, when tried by principles of Taste, turns out to be a very meritorious performance. Thus all the world is pleased; the old proverb is justified, that it is an ill wind which blows nobody good; the amateur, from looking bilious and sulky, by too close an attention to virtue, begins to pick up his crumbs; and general hilarity prevails. Virtue has had her day; and henceforward, *Virtù*, so nearly the same thing as to differ only by a single letter (which surely is not worth haggling or hig-gling about)—*Virtù*, I repeat, and Connoisseurship, have leave to provide for themselves. Upon this principle, gentlemen, I propose to guide your studies, from Cain to Mr. Thurtell.¹ Through this great gallery of murder, therefore, together let us wander hand in hand, in delighted admiration; while I endeavour to point your attention to the objects of profitable criticism.

The first murder is familiar to you all. As the inventor of murder, and the father of the art, Cain must have been a man of first-rate genius. All the Cains were men of genius. Tubal Cain invented tubes, I think, or some such thing. But, whatever might be the originality and genius of the artist, every art was then in its infancy, and the works turned out from each several *studio*, must be criticized with a recollection of that fact. Even Tubal's work would probably be little approved at this day in Sheffield; and therefore of Cain (Cain senior, I mean) it is no disparagement to say, that his performance was but so-so. Milton, however, is supposed to have thought differently. By his way of relating the case, it should seem to have been rather a pet murder with him, for he

¹ [John Thurtell, son of a mayor of Norwich, murdered William Weare on the St. Albans road in 1823. He made a vigorous speech in his own defence, but was convicted and hanged.—S.L.]

retouches it with an apparent anxiety for its picturesque effect:

Whereat he inly raged; and, as they talk'd,
Smote him into the midriff with a stone
That beat out life: he fell; and, deadly pale,
Groan'd out his soul *with gushing blood effused.*

Par. Lost, B. xi.

Upon this, Richardson the painter, who had an eye for effect, remarks as follows, in his *Notes on Paradise Lost*, p. 497: "It has been thought," says he, "that Cain beat (as the common saying is) the breath out of his brother's body with a great stone; Milton gives in to this, with the addition, however, of a large wound." In this place it was a judicious addition; for the rudeness of the weapon, unless raised and enriched by a warm, sanguinary colouring, has too much of the naked air of the savage school; as if the deed were perpetrated by a Polypheme without science, premeditation, or anything but a mutton bone. However, I am chiefly pleased with the improvement, as it implies that Milton was an amateur. As to Shakspeare, there never was a better; witness his description of the murdered Duncan, Banquo, etc.; and above all, witness his incomparable miniature, in *Henry VI*, of the murdered Gloucester.¹

¹ The passage occurs in the *second* part (act 3) of *Henry VI*, and is doubly remarkable—first, for its critical fidelity to nature, were the description meant only for *poetic* effect; but, secondly, for the *judicial* value impressed upon it when offered (as here it *is* offered) in silent corroboration legally of a dreadful whisper, all at once arising, that foul play had been dealing with a great prince, clothed with an official state character. It is the Duke of Gloucester, faithful guardian and loving uncle of the simple and imbecile king, who has been found dead in his bed. How shall this event be interpreted? Had he died under some natural visitation of Providence, or by violence from his enemies? The two court factions read the circumstantial indications of the case into opposite constructions. The affectionate and afflicted young king, whose position almost pledges him to neutrality, cannot, nevertheless, disguise his overwhelming suspicions of hellish conspiracy in the background. Upon this, a leader of the opposite faction endeavours to break the force of this royal frankness, countersigned and echoed most impressively by Lord Warwick. "What *instance*," he asks—meaning by *instance* not example or illustration,

The foundation of the art having been once laid, it is pitiable to see how it slumbered without improvement for ages. In fact, I shall now be obliged to leap over all murders, sacred and profane, as utterly unworthy of notice, until long after the Christian era. Greece, even in the age of Pericles, produced no murder, or at least none is recorded, of the slightest merit; and Rome had too little originality of genius in any of the arts to succeed where her model failed her.¹ In fact, the Latin

as thoughtless commentators have constantly supposed, but in the common scholastic sense—what *instantia*, what pressure of argument, what urgent plea, can Lord Warwick put forward in support of his “dreadful oath”—an oath, namely, that, as surely as he hopes for the life eternal, so surely

I do believe that violent hands were laid
Upon the life of this thrice famed duke.

Ostensibly the challenge is to Warwick, but substantially it is meant for the king. And the reply of Warwick, the argument on which he builds, lies in a solemn array of all the changes worked in the duke's features by death, as irreconcilable with any other hypothesis than that this death had been a violent one. What argument have I that Gloucester died under the hands of murderers? Why, the following roll-call of awful changes, affecting head, face, nostrils, eyes, hands, etc., which do not belong indifferently to any mode of death, but exclusively to a death by violence:

But see, his face is black and full of blood;
His eyeballs farther out than when he lived,
Staring full ghastly, like a strangled man;
His hair uprear'd, his nostrils stretch'd with struggling;
His hands abroad display'd, as one that grasp'd
And tugg'd for life, and was by strength subdued.
Look on the sheets:—his hair, you see, is sticking;
His well-proportion'd beard made rough and rugged,
Like to the summer's corn by tempest lodged.
It cannot be but he was murder'd here;
The least of all these signs were probable.

As the logic of the case, let us not for a moment forget, that, to be of any value, the signs and indications pleaded must be sternly *diagnostic*. The discrimination sought for is between death that is natural, and death that is violent. All indications, therefore, that belong equally and indifferently to either, are equivocal, useless, and alien from the very purpose of the signs here registered by Shakspeare.

¹ At the time of writing this, I held the common opinion upon that subject. Mere inconsideration it was that led to so erroneous

language sinks under the very idea of murder. "The man was murdered;"—how will this sound in Latin? *Interfectus est, interemptus est*—which simply expresses a homicide; and hence the Christian Latinity of the middle ages was obliged to introduce a new word, such as the feebleness of classic conceptions never ascended to. *Murdratus est*, says the sublimer dialect of Gothic ages. Meantime, the Jewish school of murder kept alive whatever was yet known in the art, and gradually transferred it to the Western World. Indeed, the Jewish school was always respectable, even in its medieval stages, as the case of Hugh of Lincoln shows, which was honoured with the approbation of Chaucer, on occasion of another performance from the same school, which, in his *Canterbury Tales*, he puts into the mouth of the Lady Abbess.

Recurring, however, for one moment, to classical antiquity, I cannot but think that Catiline, Clodius, and some of that coterie, would have made first-rate artists; and it is on all accounts to be regretted, that the priggism of Cicero robbed his country of the only chance she had for distinction in this line. As the *subject* of a murder, no person could have answered better than himself. Oh Gemini! how he would have howled with panic, if he had heard Cethegus under his bed. It would have been truly diverting to have listened to him; and satisfied I am, gentlemen, that he would have preferred the *utile* of creeping into a closet, or even into a *cloaca*, to the *honestum* of facing the bold artist.

a judgment. Since then, on closer reflection, I have seen ample reason to retract it: satisfied I now am, that the Romans, in every art which allowed to them any parity of advantages, had merits as racy, native, and characteristic, as the best of the Greeks. Elsewhere I shall plead this cause circumstantially, with the hope of converting the reader. In the meantime, I was anxious to lodge my protest against this ancient error; an error which commenced in the time-serving sycophancy of Virgil the court-poet. With the base purpose of gratifying Augustus in his vindictive spite against Cicero, and by way of introducing, therefore, the little clause, *orabunt Causas melius* as applying to all Athenian against all Roman orators, Virgil did not scruple to sacrifice by wholesale the just pretensions of his compatriots collectively.

To come now to the dark ages—(by which we that speak with precision mean, *par excellence*, the tenth century as a meridian line, and the two centuries immediately before and after, full midnight being from A. D. 888 to 1111)—these ages ought naturally to be favourable to the art of murder; as they were to church architecture, to stained glass, etc.; and, accordingly, about the latter end of this period, there arose a great character in our art, I mean the Old Man of the Mountains. He was a shining light, indeed, and I need not tell you, that the very word “assassin” is deduced from him. So keen an amateur was he, that on one occasion, when his own life was attempted by a favourite assassin, he was so much pleased with the talent shown, that, notwithstanding the failure of the artist, he created him a duke upon the spot, with remainder to the female line, and settled a pension on him for three lives. Assassination is a branch of the art which demands a separate notice; and it is possible that I may devote an entire lecture to it.

Meantime, I shall only observe how odd it is, that this branch of the art has flourished by intermitting fits. It never rains, but it pours. Our own age can boast of some fine specimens, such, for instance, as Bellingham’s affair with the prime minister Percival, the Duc de Berri’s case at the Parisian Opera House, the Maréchal Bessieres’ case at Avignon; and about two and a half centuries ago, there was a most brilliant constellation of murders in this class. I need hardly say, that I allude especially to those seven splendid works—the assassinations of William I, of Orange; of the three French Henries, viz.—Henri, Duke of Guise, that had a fancy for the throne of France; of Henri III, last prince in the line of Valois, who then occupied that throne; and finally of Henri IV, his brother-in-law, who succeeded to that throne as first prince in the line of Bourbon; not eighteen years later came the 5th on the roll, viz., that of our Duke of Buckingham (which you will find excellently described in the letters published by Sir Henry Ellis, of the British Museum), 6thly of Gustavus Adolphus, and 7thly of Wallenstein. What a glorious Pleiad of murders!

And it increases one's admiration—that this bright constellation of artistic displays, comprehending 3 Majesties, 3 Serene Highnesses, and 1 Excellency, all lay within so narrow a field of time as between A.D. 1588 and 1635. The King of Sweden's assassination, by the by, is doubted by many writers, Harte amongst others; but they are wrong. He was murdered; and I consider his murder unique in its excellence; for he was murdered at noon-day, and on the field of battle—a feature of original conception, which occurs in no other work of art that I remember. To conceive the idea of a secret murder on private account, as enclosed within a little parenthesis on a vast stage of public battle-carnage, is like Hamlet's subtle device of a tragedy within a tragedy. Indeed, all of these assassinations may be studied with profit by the advanced connoisseur. They are all of them *exemplaria*, model murders, pattern murders, of which one may say—

Nocturnâ versate manu, versate diurnâ;

especially *nocturnâ*.

In these assassinations of princes and statesmen, there is nothing to excite our wonder; important changes often depend on their deaths; and, from the eminence on which they stand, they are peculiarly exposed to the aim of every artist who happens to be possessed by the craving for scenical effect. But there is another class of assassinations, which has prevailed from an early period of the seventeenth century, that really *does* surprise me; I mean the assassination of philosophers. For, gentlemen, it is a fact, that every philosopher of eminence for the two last centuries has either been murdered, or, at the least, been very near it; insomuch, that if a man calls himself a philosopher, and never had his life attempted, rest assured there is nothing in him; and against Locke's philosophy in particular, I think it an unanswerable objection (if we needed any), that, although he carried his throat about with him in this world for seventy-two years, no man ever condescended to cut it. As these cases of philosophers are not much known, and are

generally good and well composed in their circumstances, I shall here read an excursus on that subject, chiefly by way of showing my own learning.

The first great philosopher of the seventeenth century (if we except Bacon and Galileo) was Des Cartes; and if ever one could say of a man that he was all *but* murdered—murdered within an inch—one must say it of him. The case was this, as reported by Baillet in his “*Vie De M. Des Cartes*,” tom. I. p. 102-3. In the year 1621, when Des Cartes might be about twenty-six years old, he was touring about as usual (for he was as restless as a hyena); and, coming to the Elbe, either at Gluckstadt or at Hamburg, he took shipping for East Friezland. What he could want in East Friezland no man has ever discovered; and perhaps he took this into consideration himself; for, on reaching Embden, he resolved to sail instantly for *West Friezland*; and being very impatient of delay, he hired a bark, with a few mariners to navigate it. No sooner had he got out to sea, than he made a pleasing discovery, viz., that he had shut himself up in a den of murderers. His crew, says M. Baillet, he soon found out to be “*des scélérats*”—not *amateurs*, gentlemen, as we are, but professional men—the height of whose ambition at that moment was to cut his individual throat. But the story is too pleasing to be abridged; I shall give it, therefore, accurately, from the French of his biographer: “M. Des Cartes had no company but that of his servant, with whom he was conversing in French. The sailors, who took him for a foreign merchant, rather than a cavalier, concluded that he must have money about him. Accordingly, they came to a resolution by no means advantageous to his purse. There is this difference, however, between sea-robbers and the robbers in forests, that the latter may, without hazard, spare the lives of their victims; whereas the others cannot put a passenger on shore in such a case without running the risk of being apprehended. The crew of M. Des Cartes arranged their measures with a view to evade any danger of that sort. They observed that he was a stranger from a distance, without acquaint-

ance in the country, and that nobody would take any trouble to inquire about him, in case he should never come to hand (*quand il viendrait à manquer*).” Think, gentlemen, of these Friezland dogs discussing a philosopher as if he were a puncheon of rum consigned to some ship-broker. “His temper, they remarked, was very mild and patient; and, judging from the gentleness of his deportment, and the courtesy with which he treated themselves, that he could be nothing more than some green young man, without station or root in the world, they concluded that they should have all the easier task in disposing of his life. They made no scruple to discuss the whole matter in his presence, as not supposing that he understood any other language than that in which he conversed with his servant; and the amount of their deliberation was—to murder him, then to throw him into the sea, and to divide his spoils.”

Excuse my laughing, gentlemen; but the fact is, I always *do* laugh when I think of this case—two things about it seem so droll. One is, the horrid panic or “funk” (as the men of Eton call it) in which Des Cartes must have found himself, upon hearing this regular drama sketched for his own death—funeral—succession and administration to his effects. But another thing which seems to me still more funny about this affair is, that if these Friezland hounds had been “game,” we should have no Cartesian philosophy; and how we could have done without *that*, considering the world of books it has produced, I leave to any respectable trunk-maker to declare.

However, to go on: spite of his enormous funk, Des Cartes showed fight, and by that means awed these Anti-Cartesian rascals. “Finding,” says M. Baillet, “that the matter was no joke, M. Des Cartes leaped upon his feet in a trice, assumed a stern countenance that these cravens had never looked for, and, addressing them in their own language, threatened to run them through on the spot if they dared to give him any insult.” Certainly, gentlemen, this would have been an

honour far above the merits of such inconsiderable rascals—to be spitted like larks upon a Cartesian sword; and therefore I am glad M. Des Cartes did not rob the gallows by executing his threat, especially as he could not possibly have brought his vessel to port, after he had murdered his crew; so that he must have continued to cruise for ever in the Zuyder Zee, and would probably have been mistaken by sailors for the *Flying Dutchman*, homeward bound. “The spirit which M. Des Cartes manifested,” says his biographer, “had the effect of magic on these wretches. The suddenness of their consternation struck their minds with a confusion which blinded them to their advantage, and they conveyed him to his destination as peaceably as he could desire.”

Possibly, gentlemen, you may fancy that, on the model of Caesar’s address to his poor ferryman—“*Caesarem vehis et fortunas ejus*”—M. Des Cartes needed only to have said, “Dogs, you cannot cut my throat, for you carry Des Cartes and his philosophy,” and might safely have defied them to do their worst. A German emperor had the same notion, when, being cautioned to keep out of the way of a cannonading, he replied, “Tut! man. Did you ever hear of a cannon-ball that killed an emperor?”¹ As to an emperor I cannot say, but a less thing has sufficed to smash a philosopher; and the next great philosopher of Europe undoubtedly *was* murdered. This was Spinoza.

I know very well the common opinion about him is, that he died in his bed. Perhaps he did, but he was murdered for all that; and this I shall prove by a book published at Brussels in the year 1731, entitled *La Vie de Spinoza, par M. Jean Colerus*, with many additions, from a MS. life, by one of his friends. Spinoza died on the 21st February 1677, being then little more than forty-

¹ This same argument has been employed at least once too often: some centuries hack a dauphin of France, when admonished of his risk from small-pox, made the same demand as the emperor—“Had any gentleman heard of a dauphin killed by small-pox?” No; not any gentleman *had* heard of such a case. And yet, for all that, this dauphin died of that same small-pox.

four years old. This, of itself, looks suspicious; and M. Jean admits, that a certain expression in the MS. life of him would warrant the conclusion, "que sa mort n'a pas été tout-à-fait naturelle." Living in a damp country, and a sailor's country, like Holland, he may be thought to have indulged a good deal in grog, especially in punch,¹ which was then newly discovered. Undoubtedly he might have done so; but the fact is, that he did not. M. Jean calls him "extrêmement sobre en son boire et en son manger." And though some wild stories were afloat about his using the juice of mandragora (p. 140) and opium (p. 144), yet neither of these articles is found in his druggist's bill. Living, therefore, with such sobriety, how was it possible that he should die a natural death at forty-four? Hear his biographer's account: "Sunday morning, the 21st of February, before it was church time, Spinoza came down stairs, and conversed with the master and mistress of the house." At this time, therefore, perhaps ten o'clock on Sunday morning, you see that Spinoza was alive, and pretty well. But it seems "he had summoned from Amsterdam a certain physician, whom," says the biographer, "I shall not otherwise point out to notice than by these two letters, L. M." This L. M. had directed the people of the house to purchase "an ancient cock," and to have him boiled forthwith, in order that Spinoza might take some broth about noon; which in fact he did; and ate some of the *old cock* with a good appetite, after the landlord and his wife had returned from church.

"In the afternoon, L. M. staid alone with Spinoza, the people of the house having returned to church; on coming out from which, they learned, with much sur-

¹ "June 1, 1675.—Drinke part of three boules of punch (a liquor very strainge to me)," says the Rev. Mr. Henry Teonge, in his Diary published by C. Knight. In a note on this passage, a reference is made to Fryer's *Travels to the East Indies*, 1672, who speaks of "that enervating liquor called *paunch* (which is Hindostanee for five), from five ingredients." Made thus, it seems the medical men call it diapente; if with four only, diatessaron. No doubt, it was this evangelical name that recommended it to the Rev. Mr. Teonge.

prise, that Spinoza had died about three o'clock, in the presence of L. M., who took his departure for Amsterdam that same evening, by the night-boat, without paying the least attention to the deceased," and probably without paying very much attention to the payment of his own little account. "No doubt he was the readier to dispense with these duties, as he had possessed himself of a ducatoon, and a small quantity of silver, together with a silver-hafted knife, and had absconded with his pillage." Here you see, gentlemen, the murder is plain, and the manner of it. It was L. M. who murdered Spinoza for his money. Poor Spinoza was an invalid, meagre and weak; as no blood was observed, L. M. no doubt threw him down, and smothered him with pillows—the poor man being already half-suffocated by his infernal dinner. After masticating that "ancient cock," which I take to mean a cock of the preceding century, in what condition could the poor invalid find himself for a stand-up fight with L. M.? But who was L. M.? It surely never could be Lindley Murray, for I saw him at York in 1825; and, besides, I do not think he would do such a thing—at least, not to a brother grammarian: for you know, gentlemen, that Spinoza wrote a very respectable Hebrew grammar.

Hobbes—but why, or on what principle, I never could understand—was not murdered. This was a capital oversight of the professional men in the seventeenth century; because in every light he was a fine subject for murder, except, indeed, that he was lean and skinny; for I can prove that he had money, and (what is very funny) he had no right to make the least resistance; since, according to himself, irresistible power creates the very highest species of right, so that it is rebellion of the blackest die to refuse to be murdered, when a competent force appears to murder you. However, gentlemen, though he was not murdered, I am happy to assure you that (by his own account) he was three times very near being murdered, which is consolatory. The first time was in the spring of 1640, when he pretends to have circulated a little MS. on the king's behalf against the

Parliament; he never could produce this MS., by the by; but he says, that, "Had not His Majesty dissolved the Parliament" (in May), "it had brought him into danger of his life." Dissolving the Parliament, however, was of no use; for in November of the same year the Long Parliament assembled, and Hobbes, a second time fearing he should be murdered, ran away to France. This looks like the madness of John Dennis, who thought that Louis XIV would never make peace with Queen Anne, unless he (Dennis to wit) were given up to French vengeance; and actually ran away from the sea-coast under that belief. In France, Hobbes managed to take care of his throat pretty well for ten years; but at the end of that time, by way of paying court to Cromwell, he published his *Leviathan*. The old coward now began to "funk" horribly for the third time; he fancied the swords of the cavaliers were constantly at his throat, recollecting how they had served the Parliament ambassadors at The Hague and Madrid. "Tum," says he, in his dog-Latin life of himself,

Tum venit in mentem mihi Dorislaus et Ascham;
Tanquam proscripto terror ubique aderat.

And accordingly he ran home to England. Now, certainly, it is very true that a man deserved a cudgelling for writing *Leviathan*; and two or three cudgellings for writing a pentameter ending so villainously as "terror ubique aderat!" But no man ever thought him worthy of anything beyond cudgelling. And, in fact, the whole story is a bounce of his own. For, in a most abusive letter which he wrote "to a learned person" (meaning Wallis the mathematician), he gives quite another account of the matter, and says (p. 8), he ran home "because he would not trust his safety with the French clergy;" insinuating that he was likely to be murdered for his religion, which would have been a high joke indeed—Tom's being brought to the stake for religion.

Bounce or not bounce, however, certain it is that Hobbes, to the end of his life, feared that somebody would murder him. This is proved by the story I am

going to tell you: it is not from a manuscript, but (as Mr. Coleridge says) it is as good as manuscript; for it comes from a book now entirely forgotten, viz., "The Creed of Mr. Hobbes Examined: in a Conference between him and a Student in Divinity" (published about ten years before Hobbes's death). The book is anonymous, but it was written by Tennison, the same who, about thirty years after, succeeded Tillotson as Archbishop of Canterbury. The introductory anecdote is as follows:—"A certain divine" (no doubt Tennison himself) "took an annual tour of one month to different parts of the island." In one of these excursions (1670), he visited the Peak in Derbyshire, partly in consequence of Hobbes's description of it. Being in that neighbourhood, he could not but pay a visit to Buxton; and at the very moment of his arrival, he was fortunate enough to find a party of gentlemen dismounting at the inn-door, amongst whom was a long thin fellow, who turned out to be no less a person than Mr. Hobbes, who probably had ridden over from Chatsworth.¹

Meeting so great a lion, a tourist, in search of the picturesque, could do no less than present himself in the character of bore. And luckily for this scheme, two of Mr. Hobbes's companions were suddenly summoned away by express; so that, for the rest of his stay at Buxton, he had Leviathan entirely to himself, and had the honour of bowing with him in the evening. Hobbes, it seems, at first showed a good deal of stiffness, for he was shy of divines; but this wore off, and he became very sociable and funny, and they agreed to go into the bath together. How Tennison could venture to gambol in the same water with Leviathan, I cannot explain; but so it was: they frolicked about like two dolphins, though Hobbes must have been

¹ Chatsworth was then, as now, the superb seat of the Cavendishes in their highest branch—in those days Earl, at present Duke, of Devonshire. It is to the honour of this family that, through two generations, they gave an asylum to Hobbes. It is noticeable that Hobbes was born in the year of the Spanish Armada, *i.e.*, in 1588: such, at least, is my belief. And, therefore, at this meeting with Tennison in 1670, he must have been about 82 years old.

as old as the hills; and "in those intervals wherein they abstained from swimming and plunging themselves" (*i.e.*, diving), "they discoursed of many things relating to the baths of the Ancients, and the Origine of Springs. When they had in this manner passed away an hour, they stepped out of the bath; and, having dried and cloathed themselves, they sate down in expectation of such a supper as the place afforded; designing to refresh themselves like the *Deipnosophistae*, and rather to reason than to drink profoundly. But in this innocent intention they were interrupted by the disturbance arising from a little quarrel, in which some of the ruder people in the house were for a short time engaged. At this Mr. Hobbes seemed much concerned, though he was at some distance from the persons." And why was he concerned, gentlemen? No doubt, you fancy, from some benign and disinterested love of peace, worthy of an old man and a philosopher. But listen—"For awhile he was not composed, but related it once or twice as to himself, with a low and careful, *i.e.*, anxious, tone, how Sextus Roscius was murdered after supper by the Balneae Palatinae. Of such general extent is that remark of Cicero, in relation to Epicurus the Atheist, of whom he observed, that he of all men dreaded most those things which he contemned—Death and the Gods." Merely because it was supper time, and in the neighbourhood of a bath, Mr. Hobbes must have the fate of Sextus Roscius. He must be murdered, because Sextus Roscius was murdered. What logic was there in this, unless to a man who was always dreaming of murder? Here was Leviathan, no longer afraid of the daggers of English cavaliers or French clergy, but "frightened from his propriety" by a row in an alehouse between some honest clodhoppers of Derbyshire, whom his own gaunt scarecrow of a person, that belonged to quite another century, would have frightened out of their wits.

Malebranche, it will give you pleasure to hear, was murdered. The man who murdered him is well known: it was Bishop Berkeley. The story is familiar, though hitherto not put in a proper light. Berkeley, when a

young man, went to Paris, and called on Père Malebranche. He found him in his cell cooking. Cooks have ever been a *genus irritabile*; authors still more so: Malebranche was both: a dispute arose; the old father, warm already, became warmer; culinary and metaphysical irritations united to derange his liver; he took to his bed, and died. Such is the common version of the story: "So the whole ear of Denmark is abused." The fact is, that the matter was hushed up, out of consideration for Berkeley, who (as Pope justly observes) had "every virtue under heaven:" else it was well known that Berkeley, feeling himself nettled by the waspishness of the old Frenchman, squared at him; a *turn-up* was the consequence; Malebranche was floored in the first round; the conceit was wholly taken out of him; and he would perhaps have given in; but Berkeley's blood was now up, and he insisted on the old Frenchman's retracting his doctrine of Occasional Causes. The vanity of the man was too great for this; and he fell a sacrifice to the impetuosity of Irish youth, combined with his own absurd obstinacy.

Leibnitz, being every way superior to Malebranche, one might, *a fortiori*, have counted on *his* being murdered; which, however, was not the case. I believe he was nettled at this neglect, and felt himself insulted by the security in which he passed his days. In no other way can I explain his conduct at the latter end of his life, when he chose to grow very avaricious, and to hoard up large sums of gold, which he kept in his own house. This was at Vienna, where he died; and letters are still in existence, describing the immeasurable anxiety which he entertained for his throat. Still his ambition, for being *attempted* at least, was so great, that he would not forego the danger. A late English pedagogue, of Birmingham manufacture—viz., Dr. Parr—took a more selfish course under the same circumstance. He had amassed a considerable quantity of gold and silver plate, which was for some time deposited in his bedroom at his parsonage house, Hatton. But growing every day more afraid of being murdered, which he knew that he could

not stand (and to which, indeed, he never had the slightest pretensions), he transferred the whole to the Hatton blacksmith; conceiving, no doubt, that the murder of a blacksmith would fall more lightly on the *salus reipublicae*, than that of a pedagogue. But I have heard this greatly disputed; and it seems now generally agreed, that one good horse-shoe is worth about two and a quarter Spital sermons.¹

As Leibnitz, though not murdered, may be said to have died, partly of the fear that he should be murdered, and partly of vexation that he was not, Kant, on the other hand—who manifested no ambition in that way—had a narrower escape from a murderer than any man we read of, except Des Cartes. So absurdly does fortune throw about her favours! The case is told, I think, in an anonymous life of this very great man. For health's sake, Kant imposed upon himself, at one time, a walk of six miles every day along a high-road. This fact becoming known to a man who had his private reasons for committing murder, at the third milestone from Königsberg, he waited for his "intended," who came up to time as duly as a mail-coach.

But for an accident, Kant was a dead man. This accident lay in the scrupulous, or what Mrs. Quickly would have called the *peevish*, morality of the murderer. An old professor, he fancied, might be laden with sins. Not so a young child. On this consideration, he turned away from Kant at the critical moment, and soon after murdered a child of five years old. Such is the German account of the matter; but my opinion is, that the murderer was an amateur, who felt how little would be gained to the cause of good taste by murdering an old, arid, and adust metaphysician; there was no room for

¹ "*Spital Sermons:*"—Dr. Parr's chief public appearances as an author, after his original appearance in the famous Latin preface to Bellendēnus (don't say Bellendēnus), occurred in certain Sermons at periodic intervals, delivered on behalf of some hospital (I really forget what) which retained for its official designation the old word *Spital*; and thus it happened that the Sermons themselves were generally known by the Title of *Spital Sermons*.

display, as the man could not possibly look more like a mummy when dead, than he had done alive.

Thus, gentlemen, I have traced the connection between philosophy and our art, until insensibly I find that I have wandered into our own era. This I shall not take any pains to characterize apart from that which preceded it, for, in fact, they have no distinct character. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, together with so much of the nineteenth as we have yet seen, jointly compose the Augustan age of murder. The finest work of the seventeenth century is, unquestionably, the murder of Sir Edmondbury Godfrey, which has my entire approbation. In the grand feature of *mystery*, which in some shape or other ought to colour every judicious attempt at murder, it is excellent; for the mystery is not yet dispersed. The attempt to fasten the murder upon the Papists, which would injure it as much as some well-known Correggios have been injured by the professional picture-cleaners, or would even ruin it by translating it into the spurious class of mere political or partisan murders, thoroughly wanting in the murderous *animus*, I exhort the society to discountenance.

In fact, this notion is altogether baseless, and arose in pure Protestant fanaticism. Sir Edmondbury had not distinguished himself amongst the London magistrates by any severity against the Papists, or in favouring the attempts of zealots to enforce the penal laws against individuals. He had not armed against himself the animosities of any religious sect whatever. And as to the droppings of wax lights upon the dress of the corpse when first discovered in a ditch, from which it was inferred at the time that the priests attached to the Popish Queen's Chapel had been concerned in the murder, either these were mere fraudulent artifices devised by those who wished to fix the suspicion upon the Papists, or else the whole allegation—wax-droppings, and the suggested cause of the droppings—might be a bounce or fib of Bishop Burnet; who, as the Duchess of Portsmouth used to say, was the one great master of fibbing and romancing in the seven-

teenth century. At the same time it must be observed that the quantity of murder was not great in Sir Edmondbury's century, at least amongst our own artists; which, perhaps, is attributable to the want of enlightened patronage. *Sint Maecenates, non deerant, Flacce, Marones.* Consulting Grant's *Observations on the Bills of Mortality* (4th edition, Oxford, 1665), I find that, out of 229,250, who died in London during one period of twenty years in the seventeenth century, not more than eighty-six were murdered; that is, about four three-tenths per annum.

A small number this, gentlemen, to found an academy upon; and certainly, where the quantity is so small, we have a right to expect that the quality should be first-rate. Perhaps it was; yet still I am of opinion that the best artist in this century was not equal to the best in that which followed. For instance, however praiseworthy the case of Sir Edmondbury Godfrey may be (and nobody can be more sensible of its merits than I am), still, I cannot consent to place it on a level with that of Mrs. Ruscombe of Bristol, either as to originality of design, or boldness and breadth of style. This good lady's murder took place early in the reign of George III—a reign which was notoriously favourable to the arts generally. She lived in College Green, with a single maid-servant, neither of them having any pretension to the notice of history but what they derived from the great artist whose workmanship I am recording. One fine morning, when all Bristol was alive and in motion, some suspicion arising, the neighbours forced an entrance into the house, and found Mrs. Ruscombe murdered in her bedroom, and the servant murdered on the stairs: this was at noon; and, not more than two hours before, both mistress and servant had been seen alive. To the best of my remembrance, this was in 1764; upwards of sixty years, therefore, have now elapsed, and yet the artist is still undiscovered. The suspicions of posterity have settled upon two pretenders—a baker and a chimney-sweeper. But posterity is wrong; no unpractised artist could have conceived so bold an idea as that of a

noonday murder in the heart of a great city. It was no obscure baker, gentlemen, or anonymous chimney-sweeper, be assured, that executed this work. I know who it was. (*Here there was a general buzz, which at length broke out into open applause; upon which the lecturer blushed, and went on with much earnestness.*) For heaven's sake, gentlemen, do not mistake me; it was not I that did it. I have not the vanity to think myself equal to any such achievement; be assured that you greatly overrate my poor talents; Mrs. Ruscombe's affair was far beyond my slender abilities. But I came to know who the artist was, from a celebrated surgeon who assisted at his dissection. This gentleman had a private museum in the way of his profession, one corner of which was occupied by a cast from a man of remarkably fine proportions.

"That," said the surgeon, "is a cast from the celebrated Lancashire highwayman, who concealed his profession for some time from his neighbours, by drawing woollen stockings over his horse's legs, and in that way muffling the clatter which he must else have made in riding up a flagged alley that led to his stable. At the time of his execution for highway robbery, I was studying under Cruickshank: and the man's figure was so uncommonly fine, that no money or exertion was spared to get into possession of him with the least possible delay. By the connivance of the under-sheriff, he was cut down within the legal time, and instantly put into a chaise-and-four; so that, when he reached Cruickshank's, he was positively not dead. Mr. —, a young student at that time, had the honour of giving him the *coup de grace*, and finishing the sentence of the law." This remarkable anecdote, which seemed to imply that all the gentlemen in the dissecting-room were amateurs of our class, struck me a good deal; and I was repeating it one day to a Lancashire lady, who thereupon informed me, that she had herself lived in the neighbourhood of that highwayman, and well remembered two circumstances, which combined, in the opinion of all his neighbours, to fix upon him the credit of Mrs. Ruscombe's

affair. One was, the fact of his absence for a whole fortnight at the period of that murder; the other, that, within a very little time after, the neighbourhood of this highwayman was deluged with dollars: now, Mrs. Ruscombe was known to have hoarded about two thousand of that coin. Be the artist, however, who he might, the affair remains a durable monument of his genius; for such was the impression of awe, and the sense of power left behind, by the strength of conception manifested in this murder, that no tenant (as I was told in 1810) had been found up to that time for Mrs. Ruscombe's house.

But, whilst I thus eulogize the Ruscombian case, let me not be supposed to overlook the many other specimens of extraordinary merit spread over the face of this century. Such cases, indeed, as that of Miss Bland, or of Captain Donellan, and Sir Theophilus Boughton, shall never have any countenance from me. Fie on these dealers in poison, say I: can they not keep to the old honest way of cutting throats, without introducing such abominable innovations from Italy? I consider all these poisoning cases, compared with the legitimate style, as no better than wax-work by the side of sculpture, or a lithographic print by the side of a fine Volpato. But, dismissing these, there remain many excellent works of art in a pure style, such as nobody need be ashamed to own; and this every candid connoisseur will admit. *Candid*, observe, I say; for great allowances must be made in these cases; no artist can ever be sure of carrying through his own fine preconception. Awkward disturbances will arise; people will not submit to have their throats cut quietly; they will run, they will kick, they will bite; and whilst the portrait painter often has to complain of too much torpor in his subject, the artist in our line is generally embarrassed by too much animation. At the same time, however disagreeable to the artist, this tendency in murder to excite and irritate the subject is certainly one of its advantages to the world in general, which we ought not to overlook, since it favours the development of latent talent. Jeremy Taylor notices with admiration the extraordinary leaps which people

will take under the influence of fear. There was a striking instance of this in the recent case of the M'Kears: the boy cleared a height, such as he will never clear again to his dying day. Talents also of the most brilliant description for thumping, and, indeed, for all the gymnastic exercises, have sometimes been developed by the panic which accompanies our artists; talents else buried and hid under a bushel, to the possessors, as much as to their friends. I remember an interesting illustration of this fact, in a case which I learned in Germany.

Riding one day in the neighbourhood of Munich, I overtook a distinguished amateur of our society, whose name, for obvious reasons, I shall conceal. This gentleman informed me that, finding himself wearied with the frigid pleasures (such he esteemed them) of mere amateurship, he had quitted England for the Continent—meaning to practise a little professionally. For this purpose he resorted to Germany, conceiving the police in that part of Europe to be more heavy and drowsy than elsewhere. His *début* as a practitioner took place at Mannheim; and, knowing me to be a brother amateur, he freely communicated the whole of his maiden adventure. “Opposite to my lodging,” said he, “lived a baker: he was somewhat of a miser, and lived quite alone. Whether it were his great expanse of chalky face, or what else, I know not, but the fact was, I ‘fancied’ him, and resolved to commence business upon his throat, which, by the way, he always carried bare—a fashion which is very irritating to my desires. Precisely at eight o’clock in the evening, I observed that he regularly shut up his windows. One night I watched him when thus engaged—bolted in after him—locked the door, and, addressing him with great suavity, acquainted him with the nature of my errand; at the same time advising him to make no resistance, which would be mutually unpleasant. So saying, I draw out my tools; and was proceeding to operate. But at this spectacle the baker, who seemed to have been struck by catalepsy at my first announcement, awoke into tremendous agitation. ‘I will *not* be murdered!’ he shrieked aloud; ‘what for will I’ (meaning

shall I) 'lose my precious throat?'—'What for?' said I; 'if for no other reason, for this—that you put alum into your bread. But no matter, alum or no alum (for I was resolved to forestall any argument on that point), know that I am a virtuoso in the art of murder—am desirous of improving myself in its details—and am enamoured of your vast surface of throat, to which I am determined to be a customer.'—'Is it so?' said he, 'but I'll find you a customer in another line;' and so saying, he threw himself into a boxing attitude. The very idea of his boxing struck me as ludicrous. It is true, a London baker had distinguished himself in the ring, and became known to fame under the title of the Master of the Rolls; but he was young and unspoiled; whereas, this man was a monstrous feather-bed in person, fifty years old, and totally out of condition. Spite of all this, however, and contending against me, who am a master in the art, he made so desperate a defence, that many times I feared he might turn the tables upon me; and that I, an amateur, might be murdered by a rascally baker. What a situation! Minds of sensibility will sympathize with my anxiety. How severe it was, you may understand by this, that for the first thirteen rounds the baker positively had the advantage. Round the 14th, I received a blow on the right eye, which closed it up; in the end, I believe, this was my salvation; for the anger it roused in me was so great, that, in the next, and every one of the three following rounds, I floored the baker.

"Round 19th. The baker came up piping, and manifestly the worse for wear. His geometrical exploits in the four last rounds had done him no good. However, he showed some skill in stopping a message which I was sending to his cadaverous mug; in delivering which, my foot slipped, and I went down.

"Round 20th. Surveying the baker, I became ashamed of having been so much bothered by a shapeless mass of dough; and I went in fiercely, and administered some severe punishment. A rally took place—both went down—baker undermost—ten to three on amateur.

"Round 21st. The baker jumped up with surprising

agility; indeed, he managed his pins capitally, and fought wonderfully, considering that he was drenched in perspiration; but the shine was now taken out of him, and his game was the mere effect of panic. It was now clear that he could not last much longer. In the course of this round we tried the weaving system, in which I had greatly the advantage, and hit him repeatedly on the conk. My reason for this was, that his conk was covered with carbuncles; and I thought I should vex him by taking such liberties with his conk, which in fact I did.

“The three next rounds, the master of the rolls staggered about like a cow on the ice. Seeing how matters stood, in round 24th I whispered something into his ear, which sent him down like a shot. It was nothing more than my private opinion of the value of his throat at an annuity office. This little confidential whisper affected him greatly; the very perspiration was frozen on his face, and for the next two rounds I had it all my own way. And when I called *time* for the 27th round, he lay like a log on the floor.”

After which, said I to the amateur, “It may be presumed that you accomplished your purpose.” “You are right,” said he, mildly, “I did; and a great satisfaction, you know, it was to my mind, for by this means I killed two birds with one stone;” meaning that he had both thumped the baker and murdered him. Now, for the life of me, I could not see *that*; for, on the contrary, to my mind it appeared that he had taken two stones to kill one bird, having been obliged to take the conceit out of him first with his fist, and then with his tools. But no matter for his logic. The moral of his story was good, for it showed what an astonishing stimulus to latent talent is contained in any reasonable prospect of being murdered. A pursy, unwieldy, half cataleptic baker of Mannheim had absolutely fought seven-and-twenty rounds with an accomplished English boxer, merely upon this inspiration; so greatly was natural genius exalted and sublimed by the genial presence of his murderer.

Really, gentlemen, when one hears of such things as these, it becomes a duty, perhaps, a little to soften that extreme asperity with which most men speak of murder. To hear people talk, you would suppose that all the disadvantages and inconveniences were on the side of being murdered, and that there were none at all in *not* being murdered. But considerate men think otherwise. "Certainly," says Jeremy Taylor, "it is a less temporal evil to fall by the rudeness of a sword than the violence of a fever: and the axe" (to which he might have added the ship-carpenter's mallet and the crowbar), "a much less affliction than a strangury. Very true; the bishop talks like a wise man and an amateur, as I am sure he was; and another great philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, was equally above the vulgar prejudices on this subject. He declares it to be one of "the noblest functions of reason to know whether it is time to walk out of the world or not." (Book iii, Colliers' Translation.) No sort of knowledge being rarer than this, surely *that* man must be a most philanthropic character, who undertakes to instruct people in this branch of knowledge gratis, and at no little hazard to himself. All this, however, I throw out only in the way of speculation to future moralists; declaring in the meantime my own private conviction, that very few men commit murder upon philanthropic or patriotic principles, and repeating what I have already said once at least—that, as to the majority of murderers, they are very incorrect characters.

With respect to the Williams murders, the sublimest and most entire in their excellence that ever were committed, I shall not allow myself to speak incidentally. Nothing less than an entire lecture, or even an entire course of lectures, would suffice to expound their merits. One curious fact connected with his case I shall mention, because it seems to imply that the blaze of his genius absolutely dazzled the eye of criminal justice. You all remember, I doubt not, that the instruments with which he executed his first great work (the murder of the Marrs) were a ship-carpenter's mallet and a knife. Now, the mallet belonged to an old Swede, one John

Peterson, and bore his initials. This instrument Williams left behind him in Marr's house, and it fell into the hands of the magistrates. But, gentlemen, it is a fact that the publication of this circumstance of the initials led immediately to the apprehension of Williams, and, if made earlier, would have prevented his second great work (the murder of the Williamsons), which took place precisely twelve days after. Yet the magistrates kept back this fact from the public for the entire twelve days, and until that second work was accomplished. That finished, they published it, apparently feeling that Williams had now done enough for his fame, and that his glory was at length placed beyond the reach of accident.

As to Mr. Thurtell's case, I know not what to say. Naturally, I have every disposition to think highly of my predecessor in the chair of this society; and I acknowledge that his lectures were unexceptionable. But, speaking ingenuously, I do really think that his principal performance, as an artist, has been much overrated. I admit, that at first I was myself carried away by the general enthusiasm. On the morning when the murder was made known in London, there was the fullest meeting of amateurs that I have ever known since the days of Williams; old bedridden connoisseurs, who had got into a peevish way of sneering and complaining "that there was nothing doing," now hobbled down to our club-room: such hilarity, such benign expression of general satisfaction, I have rarely witnessed. On every side you saw people shaking hands, congratulating each other, and forming dinner parties for the evening; and nothing was to be heard but triumphant challenges of—"Well! will *this* do?" "Is *this* the right thing?" "Are you satisfied at last?" But, in the middle of the row, I remember, we all grew silent, on hearing the old cynical amateur L. S—— stumping along with his wooden leg; he entered the room with his usual scowl; and, as he advanced, he continued to growl and stutter the whole way—"Mere plagiarism—bass plagiarism from hints that I threw out! Besides, his style is as harsh as Albert Dürer, and as coarse as Fuseli." Many thought

that this was mere jealousy, and general waspishness; but I confess that, when the first glow of enthusiasm had subsided, I have found most judicious critics to agree that there was something *falsetto* in the style of Thurtell. The fact is, he was a member of our society, which naturally gave a friendly bias to our judgments; and his person was universally familiar to the "fancy," which gave him, with the whole London public, a temporary popularity, that his pretensions are not capable of supporting; for *opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat*. There was, however, an unfinished design of Thurtell's for the murder of a man with a pair of dumb-bells, which I admired greatly; it was a mere outline, that he never filled in; but to my mind it seemed every way superior to his chief work. I remember that there was great regret expressed by some amateurs that this sketch should have been left in an unfinished state: but there I cannot agree with them; for the fragments and first bold outlines of original artists have often a felicity about them which is apt to vanish in the management of the details.

The case of the M'Keans¹ I consider far beyond the vaunted performance of Thurtell—indeed, above all praise; and bearing that relation, in fact, to the immortal works of Williams, which the *Aeneid* bears to the *Iliad*.

But it is now time that I should say a few words about the principles of murder, not with a view to regulate your practice, but your judgment: as to old women, and the mob of newspaper readers, they are pleased with anything, provided it is bloody enough. But the mind of sensibility requires something more. *First*, then, let us speak of the kind of person who is adapted to the purpose of the murderer; *secondly*, of the place where; *thirdly*, of the time when, and other little circumstances.

¹ [In August 1826, two brothers named Mackeans were condemned for the murder of Elizabeth Bates, and the attempted murder of several other persons, in a public-house at Winton near Manchester.—S. L.]

As to the person, I suppose it is evident that he ought to be a good man; because, if he were not, he might himself, by possibility, be contemplating murder at the very time; and such "diamond-cut-diamond" tussles, though pleasant enough where nothing better is stirring, are really not what a critic can allow himself to call murders. I could mention some people (I name no names) who have been murdered by other people in a dark lane; and so far all seemed correct enough; but, on looking further into the matter, the public have become aware that the murdered party was himself, at the moment, planning to rob his murderer, at the least, and possibly to murder him, if he had been strong enough. Whenever that is the case, or may be thought to be the case, farewell to all the genuine effects of the art. For the final purpose of murder, considered as a fine art, is precisely the same as that of tragedy, in Aristotle's account of it; viz., "to cleanse the heart by means of pity and terror." Now, terror there may be, but how can there be any pity for one tiger destroyed by another tiger?

It is also evident that the person selected ought not to be a public character. For instance, no judicious artist would have attempted to murder Abraham Newland.¹ For the case was this: everybody read so much about Abraham Newland, and so few people ever saw him, that to the general belief he was a mere abstract idea. And I remember, that once, when I happened to mention that I had dined at a coffee-house in company with Abraham Newland, everybody looked scornfully at me, as though I had pretended to have played at billiards with Prester John, or to have had an affair of honour with the Pope. And, by the way, the Pope would

¹ Abraham Newland is now utterly forgotten. But when this was written, his name had not ceased to ring in British ears, as the most familiar and most significant that perhaps has ever existed. It was the name which appeared on the face of all Bank of England notes, great or small; and had been, for more than a quarter of a century (especially through the whole career of the French Revolution), a short-hand expression for paper money in its safest form.

be a very improper person to murder: for he has such a virtual ubiquity as the father of Christendom, and, like the cuckoo, is so often heard but never seen, that I suspect most people regard *him* also as an abstract idea. Where, indeed, a public man is in the habit of giving dinners, "with every delicacy of the season," the case is very different: every person is satisfied that *he* is no abstract idea; and, therefore, there can be no impropriety in murdering him; only that his murder will fall into the class of assassinations, which I have not yet treated.

Thirdly. The subject chosen ought to be in good health: for it is absolutely barbarous to murder a sick person, who is usually quite unable to bear it. On this principle, no tailor ought to be chosen who is above twenty-five, for after that age he is sure to be dyspeptic. Or at least, if a man will hunt in that warren, he will of course think it his duty, on the old established equation, to murder some multiple of 9—say 18, 27, or 36. And here, in this benign attention to the comfort of sick people, you will observe the usual effect of a fine art to soften and refine the feelings. The world in general, gentlemen, are very bloody-minded; and all they want in a murder is a copious effusion of blood; gaudy display in this point is enough for *them*. But the enlightened connoisseur is more refined in his taste; and from our art, as from all the other liberal arts when thoroughly mastered, the result is, to humanize the heart; so true is it, that

Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes,
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.

A philosophic friend, well known for his philanthropy and general benignity, suggests that the subject chosen ought also to have a family of young children wholly dependent on his exertions, by way of deepening the pathos. And, undoubtedly, this is a judicious caution. Yet I would not insist too keenly on such a condition. Severe good taste unquestionably suggests it; but still, where the man was otherwise unobjectionable in point of morals

and health, I would not look with too curious a jealousy to a restriction which might have the effect of narrowing the artist's sphere.

So much for the person. As to the time, the place, and the tools, I have many things to say, which at present I have no room for. The good sense of the practitioner has usually directed him to night and privacy. Yet there have not been wanting cases where this rule was departed from with excellent effect. In respect to time, Mrs. Ruscombe's case is a beautiful exception, which I have already noticed; and in respect both to time and place, there is a fine exception in the annals of Edinburgh (year 1805), familiar to every child in Edinburgh, but which has unaccountably been defrauded of its due portion of fame amongst English amateurs. The case I mean is that of a porter to one of the banks, who was murdered, whilst carrying a bag of money, in broad daylight, on turning out of the High Street, one of the most public streets in Europe; and the murderer is to this hour undiscovered.

Sed fugit interea, fugit irreparabile tempus,
Singula dum capti circumvectamur amore.

And now, gentlemen, in conclusion, let me again solemnly disclaim all pretensions on my own part to the character of a professional man. I never attempted any murder in my life, except in the year 1801, upon the body of a tom-cat and *that* turned out differently from my intention. My purpose, I own, was downright murder. "Semper ego auditor tantum?" said I, "nunquamne reponam?" And I went downstairs in search of Tom at one o'clock on a dark night, with the "animus," and no doubt with the fiendish looks, of a murderer. But when I found him, he was in the act of plundering the pantry of bread and other things. Now this gave a new turn to the affair; for the time being one of general scarcity, when even Christians were reduced to the use of potato-bread, rice-bread, and all sorts of things, it was downright treason in a tom-cat to be wasting good wheaten-bread in the way he was

doing. It instantly became a patriotic duty to put him to death; and, as I raised aloft and shook the glittering steel, I fancied myself rising, like Brutus, effulgent from a crowd of patriots, and, as I stabbed him, I

Call'd aloud on Tully's name,
And bade the father of his country hail!

Since then, what wandering thoughts I may have had of attempting the life of an ancient ewe, of a superannuated hen, and such "small deer," are locked up in the secrets of my own breast; but, for the higher departments of the art, I confess myself to be utterly unfit. My ambition does not rise so high. No, gentlemen, in the words of Horace,

Fungar vice cotis, acutum
Reddere quae ferrum valet, exsors ipsa secandi.

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER ON MURDER

CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS ¹

A GOOD many years ago, the reader may remember that I came forward in the character of a *dilettante* in murder. Perhaps *dilettante* is too strong a word. *Connoisseur* is better suited to the scruples and infirmity of public taste. I suppose there is no harm in *that*, at least. A man is not bound to put his eyes, ears, and understanding into his breeches-pocket when he meets with a murder. If he is not in a downright comatose state, I suppose he must see that one murder is better or worse than another, in point of good taste. Murders have their little differences and shades of merit, as well as statues, pictures, oratorios, cameos, intaglios, or what not. You may be angry with a man for talking too much, or too publicly (as to the too much, that I deny—a man can never cultivate his taste too highly); but you must allow him

¹ [This appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for November, 1839, nearly thirteen years after the previous paper.—S. L.]

to think, at any rate. Well, would you believe it? all my neighbours came to hear of that little aesthetic essay which I had published; and, unfortunately, hearing at the very same time of a club that I was connected with, and a dinner at which I presided—both tending to the same little object as the essay, viz., the diffusion of a just taste among Her¹ Majesty's subjects, they got up the most barbarous calumnies against me. In particular, they said that I, or that the club (which comes to the same thing), had offered bounties on well-conducted homicides—with a scale of drawbacks, in case of any one defect or flaw, according to a table issued to private friends. Now let me tell the whole truth about the dinner and the club, and it will be seen how malicious the world is. But first, confidentially, allow me to say what my real principles are upon the matter in question.

As to murder, I never committed one in my life. It's a well-known thing amongst all my friends. I can get a paper to certify as much, signed by lots of people. Indeed, if you come to that, I doubt whether many people could produce as strong a certificate. Mine would be as big as a breakfast tablecloth. There is indeed one member of the club, who pretends to say he caught me once making too free with his throat on a club night, after everybody else had retired. But, observe, he shuffles in his story according to his state of civilization.² When not far gone, he contents himself with saying that he caught me ogling his throat; and that I was melancholy for some weeks after, and that my voice sounded in a way expressing, to the nice ear of a connoisseur, *the sense of opportunities lost*; but the club all know that he is a disappointed man himself, and that he speaks querulously at times about the fatal neglect of a man's coming abroad without his tools. Besides, all

¹ *Her Majesty*:—In the lecture, having occasion to refer to the reigning sovereign, I said "*His Majesty*"; for at that time William IV was on the throne: but between the lecture and this supplement had occurred the accession of our present Queen.

² [This word means "civilization" as it might be pronounced by a person who had dined too well.—S. L.]

this is an affair between two amateurs, and everybody makes allowances for little asperities and fibs in such a case.

“But,” say you, “if no murderer, you may have encouraged, or even have bespoken a murder.” No, upon my honour—no. And that was the very point I wished to argue for your satisfaction. The truth is, I am a very particular man in everything relating to murder; and perhaps I carry my delicacy too far. The Stagirite most justly, and possibly with a view to my case, placed virtue in the *τὸ μέσον*, or middle point between two extremes. A golden mean is certainly what every man should aim at. But it is easier talking than doing; and, my infirmity being notoriously too much milkiness of heart, I find it difficult to maintain that steady equatorial line between the two poles of too much murder on the one hand, and too little on the other. I am too soft—and people get excused through me—nay, go through life without an attempt made upon them, that ought *not* to be excused. I believe, if I had the management of things, there would hardly be a murder from year’s end to year’s end.

In fact, I’m for peace, and quietness, and fawningness, and what may be styled *knocking-underness*. A man came to me as a candidate for the place of my servant, just then vacant. He had the reputation of having dabbled a little in our art; some said, not without merit. What startled me, however, was, that he supposed this art to be part of his regular duties in my service, and talked of having it considered in his wages. Now, that was a thing I would not allow; so I said at once, “Richard (or James, as the case might be), you misunderstand my character. If a man will and must practise this difficult (and allow me to add, dangerous) branch of art—if he has an overruling genius for it,—why, in that case, all I say is, that he might as well pursue his studies whilst living in my service as in another’s. And also, I may observe, that it can do no harm either to himself or to the subject on whom he operates, that he should be guided by men of more taste than himself. Genius may do much, but

long study of the art must always entitle a man to offer advice. So far I will go—general principles I will suggest. But as to any particular case, once for all I will have nothing to do with it. Never tell me of any special work of art you are meditating—I set my face against it *in toto*. For, if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once begin upon this downward path, you never know where you are to stop. Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder or other that perhaps he thought little of at the time. *Principiis obsta*—that's my rule."

Such was my speech, and I have always acted up to it; so, if that is not being virtuous, I should be glad to know what is. But now about the dinner and the club. The club was not particularly of my creation; it arose pretty much as other similar associations, for the propagation of truth and the communication of new ideas; rather from the necessities of things, than upon any one man's suggestion. As to the dinner, if any man more than another could be held responsible for that, it was a member known amongst us by the name of *Toad-in-the-hole*. He was so called from his gloomy misanthropical disposition, which led him into constant disparagements of all modern murders as vicious abortions, belonging to no authentic school of art. The finest performances of our own age he snarled at cynically; and at length this querulous humour grew upon him so much, and he became so notorious as a *laudator temporis acti*, that few people cared to seek his society.

This made him still more fierce and truculent. He went about muttering and growling; wherever you met him, he was soliloquizing, and saying, "despicable pretender—without grouping—without two ideas upon handling—without"—and there you lost him. At length existence seemed to be painful to him; he rarely spoke, he seemed conversing with phantoms in the air; his housekeeper informed us that his reading was nearly confined to

God's Revenge upon Murder, by Reynolds, and a more ancient book of the same title, noticed by Sir Walter Scott in his *Fortunes of Nigel*. Sometimes, perhaps, he might read in the *Newgate Calendar* down to the year 1788, but he never looked into a book more recent. In fact, he had a theory with regard to the French Revolution, as having been the great cause of degeneration in murder. "Very soon, sir," he used to say, "men will have lost the art of killing poultry: the very rudiments of the art will have perished!" In the year 1811, he retired from general society. Toad-in-the-hole was no more seen in any public resort. We missed him from his wonted haunts—"nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he." By the side of the main conduit his listless length at noontide he would stretch, and pore upon the filth that muddled by. "Even dogs," this pensive moralist would say, "are not what they were, sir—not what they should be. I remember in my grandfather's time that some dogs had an idea of murder. I have known a mastiff, sir, that lay in ambush for a rival, yes, sir, and finally murdered him, with pleasing circumstances of good taste. I also was on intimate terms of acquaintance with a tom-cat that was an assassin. But now"—and then, the subject growing too painful, he dashed his hand to his forehead, and went off abruptly in a homeward direction towards his favourite conduit, where he was seen by an amateur in such a state, that he thought it dangerous to address him. Soon after Toad shut himself entirely up; it was understood that he had resigned himself to melancholy; and at length the prevailing notion was, that Toad-in-the-hole had hanged himself.

The world was wrong *there*, as it had been on some other questions. Toad-in-the-hole might be sleeping, but dead he was not; and of that we soon had ocular proof. One morning in 1812, an amateur surprised us with the news that he had seen Toad-in-the-hole brushing with hasty steps the dews away, to meet the postman by the conduit side. Even that was something: how much more, to hear that he had shaved his beard—had

laid aside his sad-coloured clothes, and was adorned like a bridegroom of ancient days. What could be the meaning of all this? Was Toad-in-the-hole mad—or how? Soon after the secret was explained—in more than a figurative sense “the murder was out.” For in came the London morning papers, by which it appeared that but three days before a murder, the most superb of the century by many degrees, had occurred in the heart of London. I need hardly say, that this was the great exterminating *chef-d'œuvre* of Williams at Mr. Marr's, No. 29, Ratcliffe Highway. That was the *début* of the artist; at least for anything the public knew. What occurred at Mr. Williamson's twelve nights afterwards—the second work turned out from the same chisel—some people pronounced even superior. But Toad-in-the-hole always “reclaimed,” he was even angry at such comparisons. “This vulgar *gout de comparaison*, as La Bruyère calls it,” he would often remark, “will be our ruin; each work has its own separate characteristics—each in and for itself is incomparable. One, perhaps, might suggest the *Iliad*—the other the *Odyssey*: but what do you get by such comparisons? Neither ever was, or will be surpassed; and when you've talked for hours, you must still come back to that.” Vain, however, as all criticism might be, he often said that volumes might be written on each case for itself; and he even proposed to publish in quarto on the subject.

Meantime, how had Toad-in-the-hole happened to hear of this great work of art so early in the morning? He had received an account by express despatched by a correspondent in London, who watched the progress of art on Toad's behalf, with a general commission to send off a special express, at whatever cost, in the event of any estimable works appearing. The express arrived in the night-time; Toad-in-the-hole was then gone to bed; he had been muttering and grumbling for hours, but of course he was called up. On reading the account, he threw his arms round the express, declared him his brother and his preserver, and expressed his regret at not having it in his power to knight him. We, amateurs,

having heard that he was abroad, and therefore had *not* hanged himself, made sure of soon seeing him amongst us. Accordingly he soon arrived; seized every man's hand as he passed him—wring it almost frantically, and kept ejaculating, "Why, now, here's something like a murder!—this is the real thing—this is genuine—this is what you can approve, can recommend to a friend: this—says every man, on reflection—this is the thing that ought to be! Such works are enough to make us all young." And in fact the general opinion is, that Toad-in-the-hole would have died but for this regeneration of art, which he called a second age of Leo the Tenth; and it was our duty, he said, solemnly to commemorate it. At present, and *en attendant*, he proposed that the club should meet and dine together. A dinner, therefore, was given by the club; to which all amateurs were invited from a distance of one hundred miles.

Of this dinner, there are ample short-hand notes amongst the archives of the club. But they are not "extended," to speak diplomatically; and the reporter, who only could give the whole report *in extenso*, is missing—I believe murdered. Meantime, in years long after that day, and on an occasion perhaps equally interesting, viz., the turning up of Thugs and Thuggism, another dinner was given. Of this I myself kept notes, for fear of another accident to the short-hand reporter. And I here subjoin them. Toad-in-the-hole, I must mention, was present at this dinner. In fact, it was one of its sentimental incidents. Being as old as the valleys at the dinner of 1812, naturally he was as old as the hills at the Thug dinner of 1838. He had taken to wearing his beard again; why, or with what view, it passes my persimmon to tell you. But so it was. And his appearance was most benign and venerable. Nothing could equal the angelic radiance of his smile, as he inquired after the unfortunate reporter (whom, as a piece of private scandal, I should tell you that he was himself supposed to have murdered in a rapture of creative art): the answer was, with roars of laughter, from the under-sheriff of our county—*non est inventus*. Toad-in-the-

hole laughed outrageously at this: in fact, we all thought he was choking; and, at the earnest request of the company, a musical composer furnished a most beautiful glee upon the occasion, which was sung five times after dinner, with universal applause and inextinguishable laughter, the words being these (and the chorus so contrived, as most beautifully to mimic the peculiar laughter of Toad-in-the-hole):—

Et interrogatum est à Toad-in-the-hole—Ubi est ille reporter?
Et responsum est cum cachinno—*Non est inventus.*

Chorus.

Deinde iteratum est ab omnibus, cum cachinnatione undulante trepidante—*Non est inventus.*

Toad-in-the-hole, I ought to mention, about nine years before, when an express from Edinburgh brought him the earliest intelligence of the Burke-and-Hare revolution in the art, went mad upon the spot: and instead of a pension to the express for even one life, or a knighthood, endeavoured to Burke him; in consequence of which he was put into a straight-waistcoat. And that was the reason we had no dinner then. But now all of us were alive and kicking, straight-waistcoaters and others; in fact, not one absentee was reported upon the entire roll. There were also many foreign amateurs present.

Dinner being over, and the cloth drawn, there was a general call made for the new glee of *Non est inventus*; but, as this would have interfered with the requisite gravity of the company during the earlier toasts, I overruled the call. After the national toasts had been given, the first official toast of the day was, *The Old Man of the Mountains*—drunk in solemn silence.

Toad-in-the-hole returned thanks in a neat speech. He likened himself to the Old Man of the Mountains, in a few brief allusions, and made the company yell with laughter; and he concluded with giving the health of

Mr. Von Hammer, with many thanks to him for his learned History of the Old Man and his subjects the assassins.

Upon this I rose and said, that doubtless most of the company were aware of the distinguished place assigned by orientalists to the very learned Turkish scholar, Von Hammer the Austrian; that he had made the profoundest researches into our art, as connected with those early and eminent artists, the Syrian assassins in the period of the Crusaders; that his work had been for several years deposited, as a rare treasure of art, in the library of the club. Even the author's name, gentlemen, pointed him out as the historian of our art—Von Hammer—

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Toad-in-the-hole, “Von Hammer—he's the man for a *malleus haereticorum*. You all know what consideration Williams bestowed on the hammer, or the ship-carpenter's mallet, which is the same thing. Gentlemen, I give you another great hammer—Charles the Hammer, the Marteau, or, in old French, the Martel—he hammered the Saracens till they were all as dead as door-nails.”

“*Charles the Hammer*, with all the honours.”

But the explosion of Toad-in-the-hole, together with the uproarious cheers for the grandpapa of Charlemagne, had now made the company unmanageable. The orchestra was again challenged with shouts the stormiest for the new glee. I foresaw a tempestuous evening; and I ordered myself to be strengthened with three waiters on each side; the vice-president with as many. Symptoms of unruly enthusiasm were beginning to show out; and I own that I myself was considerably excited, as the orchestra opened with its storm of music, and the impassioned glee began—“*Et interrogatum est à Toad-in-the-hole—Ubi est ille Reporter?*” And the frenzy of the passion became absolutely convulsing, as the full chorus fell in—“*Et iteratum est ab omnibus—Non est inventus.*”

The next toast was—*The Jewish Sicarii*.

Upon which I made the following explanation to the company:—“Gentlemen, I am sure it will interest you all to hear that the assassins, ancient as they were, had a race of predecessors in the very same country. All

over Syria, but particularly in Palestine, during the early years of the Emperor Nero, there was a band of murderers, who prosecuted their studies in a very novel manner. They did not practise in the night-time, or in lonely places; but, justly considering that great crowds are in themselves a sort of darkness by means of the dense pressure, and the impossibility of finding out who it was that gave the blow, they mingled with mobs everywhere; particularly at the great paschal feast in Jerusalem; where they actually had the audacity, as Josephus assures us, to press into the temple—and whom should they choose for operating upon but Jonathan himself, the Pontifex Maximus? They murdered him, gentlemen, as beautifully as if they had had him alone on a moonless night in a dark lane. And when it was asked, who was the murderer, and where he was——”

“Why, then it was answered,” interrupted Toad-in-the-hole, “*Non est inventus.*” And then, in spite of all I could do or say, the orchestra opened, and the whole company began—“*Et interrogatum est à Toad-in-the-hole—Ubi est ille Sicarius? Et responsum est ab omnibus—Non est inventus.*”

When the tempestuous chorus had subsided, I began again:—“Gentlemen, you will find a very circumstantial account of the Sicarii in at least three different parts of Josephus; once in Book XX, sec. v, c. 8, of his *Antiquities*; once in Book I of his *Wars*; but in sec. x of the chapter first cited you will find a particular description of their tooling. This is what he says:—‘They tooled with small scimitars not much different from the Persian *acinacæ*, but more curved, and for all the world most like the Roman semi-lunar *sicæ*.’ It is perfectly magnificent, gentlemen, to hear the sequel of their history. Perhaps the only case on record where a regular army of murderers was assembled, a *justus exercitus*, was in the case of these *Sicarii*. They mustered in such strength in the wilderness, that Festus himself was obliged to march against them with the Roman legionary force. A pitched battle ensued; and

this army of amateurs was all cut to pieces in the desert. Heavens, gentlemen, what a sublime picture! The Roman legions—the wilderness—Jerusalem in the distance—an army of murderers in the foreground!”

The next toast was—“To the further improvement of Tooling, and thanks to the Committee for their services.”

Mr. L., on behalf of the Committee who had reported on that subject, returned thanks. He made an interesting extract from the report, by which it appeared how very much stress had been laid formerly on the mode of tooling by the fathers, both Greek and Latin. In confirmation of this pleasing fact, he made a very striking statement in reference to the earliest work of antediluvian art. Father Mersenne, that learned French Roman Catholic, in page one thousand four hundred and thirty-one¹ of his operose Commentary on Genesis, mentions, on the authority of several rabbis, that the quarrel of Cain with Abel was about a young woman; that, according to various accounts, Cain had tooled with his teeth (*Abelem fuisse morsibus dilaceratum à Cain*); according to many others, with the jaw-bone of an ass, which is the tooling adopted by most painters. But it is pleasing to the mind of sensibility to know that, as science expanded, sounder views were adopted. One author contends for a pitchfork, St. Chrysostom for a sword, Irenaeus for a scythe, and Prudentius, the Christian poet of the fourth century, for a hedging-bill. This last writer delivers his opinion thus:—

Frater, probatae sanctitatis aemulus,
Germana curvo colla frangit sarculo :

i.e., his brother, jealous of his attested sanctity, fractures his fraternal throat with a curved hedging-bill. “All which is respectfully submitted by your committee, not so much as decisive of the question (for it is not), but in order to impress upon the youthful mind the importance

¹ Page one thousand four hundred and thirty-one:—*literally*, good reader, and no joke at all.

which has ever been attached to the quality of the tooling by such men as Chrysostom and Irenaeus."

"Irenaeus be hanged;" said Toad-in-the-hole, who now rose impatiently to give the next toast:—"Our Irish friends; wishing them a speedy revolution in their mode of tooling, as well as in everything else connected with the art!"

"Gentlemen, I'll tell you the plain truth. Every day of the year we take up a paper, we read the opening of a murder. We say, this is good, this is charming, this is excellent! But, behold you! scarcely have we read a little farther, before the word Tipperary or Ballina-something betrays the Irish manufacture. Instantly we loathe it; we call to the waiter; we say, 'Waiter, take away this paper; send it out of the house; it is absolutely a scandal in the nostrils of all just taste.' I appeal to every man, whether, on finding a murder (otherwise perhaps promising enough) to be Irish, he does not feel himself as much insulted as when, Madeira being ordered, he finds it to be Cape; or when, taking up what he takes to be a mushroom, it turns out what children call a toad-stool. Tithes, politics, something wrong in principle, vitiate every Irish murder. Gentlemen, this must be reformed, or Ireland will not be a land to live in; at least, if we do live there, we must import all our murders, that's clear." Toad-in-the-hole sat down, growling with suppressed wrath; and the uproarious "Hear, hear!" clamorously expressed the general concurrence.

The next toast was—"The sublime epoch of Burkism and Harism!"

This was drunk with enthusiasm; and one of the members, who spoke to the question, made a very curious communication to the company:—"Gentlemen, we fancy Burkism to be a pure invention of our own times: and in fact no Pancirollus has ever enumerated this branch of art when writing *de rebus deperditis*. Still, I have ascertained that the essential principle of this variety in the art *was* known to the ancients; although, like the art of painting upon glass, of making the

myrrhine cups, etc., it was lost in the dark ages for want of encouragement. In the famous collection of Greek epigrams made by Planudes, is one upon a very fascinating case of Burkism: it is a perfect little gem of art. The epigram itself I cannot lay my hand upon at this moment; but the following is an abstract of it by Salmasius, as I find it in his notes on Vopiscus: 'Est et elegans epigramma Lucilii, ubi medicus et pollinctor de compacto sic egerunt, ut medicus aegros omnes curae suae commissos occideret': This was the basis of the contract, you see, that on the one part the doctor, for himself and his assigns, doth undertake and contract duly and truly to murder all the patients committed to his charge: but why? There lies the beauty of the case — 'Et ut pollinctori amico suo traderet pollingendos.' The *pollinctor*, you are aware, was a person whose business it was to dress and prepare dead bodies for burial. The original ground of the transaction appears to have been sentimental: 'He was my friend,' says the murderous doctor; 'he was dear to me,' in speaking of the pollinctor. But the law, gentlemen, is stern and harsh: the law will not hear of these tender motives: to sustain a contract of this nature in law, it is essential that a 'consideration' should be given. Now what *was* the consideration? For thus far all is on the side of the pollinctor: he will be well paid for his services; but, meantime, the generous, the noble-minded doctor gets nothing. What *was* the equivalent, again I ask, which the law would insist on the doctor's taking, in order to establish that 'consideration,' without which the contract had no force? You shall hear: 'Et ut pollinctor vicissim τελαμῶνας quos furabatur de pollinzione mortuorum medico mitteret donis ad alliganda vulnera eorum quos curabat;' *i.e.*, and that reciprocally the pollinctor should transmit to the physician, as free gifts for the binding up of wounds in those whom he treated medically, the belts or trusses (τελαμῶνας) which he had succeeded in purloining in the course of his functions about the corpses.

"Now, the case is clear: the whole went on a principle

of reciprocity which would have kept up the trade for ever. The doctor was also a surgeon: he could not murder *all* his patients: some of the patients must be retained intact. For these he wanted linen bandages. But, unhappily, the Romans wore woollen, on which account it was that they bathed so often. Meantime, there *was* linen to be had in Rome; but it was monstrously dear; and the *τελαμῶνες*, or linen swathing bandages, in which superstition obliged them to bind up corpses, would answer capitally for the surgeon. The doctor, therefore, contracts to furnish his friend with a constant succession of corpses, provided, and be it understood always, that his said friend, in return, should supply him with one-half the articles he would receive from the friends of the parties murdered or to be murdered. The doctor invariably recommended his invaluable friend the pollinctor (whom let us call the undertaker); the undertaker, with equal regard to the sacred rights of friendship, uniformly recommended the doctor. Like Pylades and Orestes, they were models of a perfect friendship: in their lives they were lovely: and on the gallows, it is to be hoped, they were not divided.

“Gentlemen, it makes me laugh horribly, when I think of those two friends drawing and re-drawing on each other: ‘Pollinctor in account with Doctor, debtor by sixteen corpses: creditor by forty-five bandages, two of which damaged.’ Their names unfortunately are lost; but I conceive they must have been Quintus Birkius and Publius Harius. By the way, gentlemen, has anybody heard lately of Hare? I understand he is comfortably settled in Ireland, considerably to the west, and does a little business now and then; but, as he observes with a sigh, only as a retailer—nothing like the fine thriving wholesale concern so carelessly blown up at Edinburgh. ‘You see what comes of neglecting business’—is the chief moral, the *ἐπιμύθιον*, as Aesop would say, which Hare draws from his past experience.”

At length came the toast of the day—*Thugdom in all its branches*.

The speeches *attempted* at this crisis of the dinner

were past all counting. But the applause was so furious, the music so stormy, and the crashing of glasses so incessant, from the general resolution never again to drink an inferior toast from the same glass, that I am unequal to the task of reporting. Besides which, Toad-in-the-hole now became ungovernable. He kept firing pistols in every direction; sent his servant for a blunderbuss, and talked of loading with ball-cartridge. We conceived that his former madness had returned at the mention of Burke and Hare; or that, being again weary of life, he had resolved to go off in a general massacre. This we could not think of allowing; it became indispensable, therefore, to kick him out; which we did with universal consent, the whole company lending their toes *uno pede*, as I may say, though pitying his grey hairs and his angelic smile. During the operation, the orchestra poured in their old chorus. The universal company sang, and (what surprised us most of all) Toad-in-the-hole joined us furiously in singing—

Et interrogatum est ab omnibus—Ubi est ille Toad-in-the-hole?
Et responsum est ab omnibus—Non est inventus.

FICTION

THE SPANISH MILITARY NUN

[De Quincey made several attempts at fiction. With one exception these are not among his more successful productions. The romance *Klosterheim*, one of the only two works which he published in the first instance in book form, is gloomy and rather dull. Some of his shorter tales, either original or adapted from the German, show a certain skill in dealing with the elements of horror and fear, and they may have suggested something to Edgar Allan Poe who undoubtedly owed a good deal in various ways to their author. But one piece De Quincey has left which may almost be regarded as a masterpiece—pretty nearly the best humorous romance or picaresque novel in the English language. It detracts little from the writer's merit that the story is not original but only a glorified, transformed, purified, and vitalised adaptation from the French. *The Spanish Military Nun* first appeared in Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1847, under the clumsy title of *The Nautico-Military Nun and Ensign of Spain*. De Quincey derived it from an article called "Catalina de Erauso" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of February 1847, by Alexis de Valon. This is a compressed version of the Spanish "History of the Nun-Lieutenant Doña Catalina de Erauso written by Herself," which had been recovered and printed from a manuscript by Joaquin Maria de Ferrer in 1829. Doña Catalina was an historic personage, and the Ferrer manuscript was probably compiled from notes left by those who had heard her own accounts of her highly adventurous career. She was the daughter of a Basque gentleman and became a novice in a convent at San Sebastian in 1603. In 1607 she escaped from the convent, sailed for South America in male attire, enlisted in one of the King of Spain's regiments, and served in several campaigns in Chile and Peru. Her disguise was never penetrated until she was dangerously wounded in a street-brawl, and protected by the Bishop of Guamanga, to whom she revealed her sex. She then returned to Spain where the report of her adventures, and the conspicuous bravery she had often displayed, rendered her a notable personage. Subsequently she went back to South America, and settled down prosperously to the carrying trade. All that is authentically known of her is set forth

by Mr. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, in the valuable Introduction and Note to his English version of *The Nun-Ensign* (1908). He points out that De Quincey had never seen Ferrer's book, that he had not taken the trouble even to read De Valon with care, and that he added inaccuracies and discrepancies of his own to those of his original. Nevertheless literature is indebted to him for turning the truculent and rather vulgar virago of the Spanish *Historia de la Monja Alférez* into the gallant, gay, and charming "Kate" of his lively romance.

The extract given describes the last of the nun-ensign's adventures in Peru, in the course of which she rescues a lady who is threatened with death by a jealous husband, kills the husband, and receives the wound which leads to the disclosure of her sex.]

THIS alcalde's acquaintance, however, was not destined to drop here. Something had appeared in the young caballero's bearing which made it painful to have addressed him with harshness, or for a moment to have entertained such a charge against such a person. He despatched his cousin, therefore, Don Antonio Calderon, to offer his apologies; and at the same time to request that the stranger, whose rank and quality he regretted not to have known, would do him the honour to come and dine with him. This explanation, and the fact that Don Antonio had already proclaimed his own position as cousin to the magistrate, and nephew to the Bishop of Cuzco, obliged Catalina to say, after thanking the gentlemen for their obliging attentions, "I myself hold the rank of Alférez in the service of his Catholic Majesty. I am a native of Biscay, and I am now repairing to Cuzco on private business."—"To Cuzco!" exclaimed Antonio; "and you from dear lovely Biscay! How very fortunate! My cousin is a Basque like you; and, like you, he starts for Cuzco to-morrow morning; so that, if it is agreeable to you, Senor Alférez, we will travel together." It was settled that they should. To travel—amongst "balcony witnesses," and anglers for "blind horses"—not merely with a just man, but with the very abstract idea and riding allegory of justice, was too delightful to the storm-wearied cornet; and he cheerfully accompanied Don Antonio to the house of the magistrate, called Don Pedro de Chavarria. Distin-

guished was his reception; the alcalde personally renewed his regrets for the ridiculous scene of the two scampish oculists, and presented Kate to his wife—a most splendid Andalusian beauty, to whom he had been married about a year.

This lady there is a reason for describing; and the French reporter of Catalina's memoirs dwells upon the theme. She united, he says, the sweetness of the German lady with the energy of the Arabian—a combination hard to judge of. As to her feet, he adds, I say nothing, for she had scarcely any at all. "*Je ne parle point des pieds, elle n'en avait presque pas.*" "Poor lady!" says a compassionate rustic: "no feet! What a shocking thing that so fine a woman should have been so sadly mutilated!" Oh, my dear rustic, you're quite in the wrong box. The Frenchman means this as the very highest compliment. Beautiful, however, she must have been; and a Cinderella, I hope, but still not a Cinderellula, considering that she had the inimitable walk and step of Andalusian women, which cannot be accomplished without something of a proportionate basis to stand upon.

The reason which there is (as I have said) for describing this lady, arises out of her relation to the tragic events which followed. She, by her criminal levity, was the cause of all. And I must here warn the moralising blunderer of two errors that he is likely to make: 1st, that he is invited to read some extract from a licentious amour, as if for its own interest; 2dly, or on account of Donna Catalina's memoirs, with a view to relieve their too martial character. I have the pleasure to assure him of his being so utterly in the darkness of error, that any possible change he can make in his opinions, right or left, must be for the better: he cannot stir, but he will mend, which is a delightful thought for the moral and blundering mind. As to the first point, what little glimpse he obtains of a licentious amour is, as a court of justice will sometimes show him such a glimpse, simply to make intelligible the subsequent facts which depend upon it. Secondly, as to the conceit that

Catalina wished to embellish her memoirs, understand that no such practice then existed—certainly not in Spanish literature. Her memoirs are electrifying by their facts; else, in the manner of telling these facts, they are systematically dry.

But let us resume. Don Antonio Calderon was a handsome, accomplished cavalier. And in the course of dinner Catalina was led to judge, from the behaviour to each other of this gentleman and the lady, the *alcalde's* beautiful wife, that they had an improper understanding. This also she inferred from the furtive language of their eyes. Her wonder was, that the *alcalde* should be so blind; though upon that point she saw reason in a day or two to change her opinion. Some people see everything by affecting to see nothing. The whole affair, however, was nothing at all to *her*; and she would have dismissed it altogether from her thoughts, but for the dreadful events on the journey.

This went on but slowly, however steadily. Owing to the miserable roads, eight hours a-day of travelling was found quite enough for man and beast; the product of which eight hours was from ten to twelve leagues, taking the league at $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles. On the last day but one of the journey, the travelling party, which was precisely the original dinner party, reached a little town ten leagues short of Cuzco. The *corrégidor* of this place was a friend of the *alcalde*; and through *his* influence the party obtained better accommodations than those which they had usually commanded in a hovel calling itself a *venta*, or in a sheltered corner of a barn. The *alcalde* was to sleep at the *corrégidor's* house; the two young cavaliers, Calderon and our Kate, had sleeping-rooms at the public *locanda*; but for the lady was reserved a little pleasure-house in an enclosed garden. This was a mere toy of a house; but the season being summer, and the house surrounded with tropical flowers, the lady preferred it (in spite of its loneliness) to the damp mansion of the official grandee, who, in her humble opinion, was quite as fusty as his mansion, and his mansion not much less so than himself.

After dining gaily together at the *locanda*, and possibly taking a "rise" out of his worship the *corrégidor*, as a repeating echo of Don Quixote (then growing popular in Spanish America), the young man Don Antonio, who was no young officer, and the young officer Catalina, who was no young man, lounged down together to the little pavilion in the flower-garden, with the purpose of paying their respects to the presiding belle. They were graciously received, and had the honour of meeting there his mustiness the *alcalde*, and his fustiness the *corrégidor*; whose conversation ought surely to have been edifying, since it was anything but brilliant. How they got on under the weight of two such muffs, has been a mystery for two centuries. But they *did* to a certainty, for the party did not break up till eleven. *Tea and turn-out* you could not call it; for there was the *turn-out* in rigour, but not the *tea*. One thing, however, Catalina by mere accident had an opportunity of observing, and observed with pain. The two official gentlemen, on taking leave, had gone down the steps into the garden. Catalina, having forgot her hat, went back into the little vestibule to look for it. There stood the lady and Don Antonio, exchanging a few final words (they *were* final) and a few final signs. Amongst the last Kate observed distinctly this, and distinctly she understood it. First of all, by raising her forefinger, the lady drew Calderon's attention to the act which followed as one of significant pantomime; which done, she snuffed out one of the candles. The young man answered it by a look of intelligence; and then all three passed down the steps together. The lady was disposed to take the cool air, and accompanied them to the garden-gate; but, in passing down the walk, Catalina noticed a second ill-omened sign that all was not right. Two glaring eyes she distinguished amongst the shrubs for a moment, and a rustling immediately after. "What's that?" said the lady; and Don Antonio answered, carelessly, "A bird flying out of the bushes." But birds do not amuse themselves by staying up to midnight; and birds do not wear rapiers.

Catalina, as usual, had read everything. Not a wrinkle or a rustle was lost upon *her*. And, therefore, when she reached the *locanda*, knowing to an iota all that was coming, she did not retire to bed, but paced before the house. She had not long to wait: in fifteen minutes the door opened softly, and out stepped Calderon. Kate walked forward, and faced him immediately; telling him laughingly that it was not good for his health to go abroad on this night. The young man showed some impatience; upon which, very seriously, Kate acquainted him with her suspicions, and with the certainty that the *alcalde* was not so blind as he had seemed. Calderon thanked her for the information; would be upon his guard; but, to prevent further expostulation, he wheeled round instantly into the darkness. Catalina was too well convinced, however, of the mischief on foot to leave him thus. She followed rapidly, and passed silently into the garden, almost at the same time with Calderon. Both took their stations behind trees; Calderon watching nothing but the burning candles, Catalina watching circumstances to direct her movements. The candles burned brightly in the little pavilion. Presently one was extinguished. Upon this, Calderon pressed forward to the steps, hastily ascended them, and passed into the vestibule. Catalina followed on his traces. What succeeded was all one scene of continued, dreadful dumb show; different passions of panic, or deadly struggle, or hellish malice, absolutely suffocated all articulate utterances.

In the first moments a gurgling sound was heard, as of a wild beast attempting vainly to yell over some creature that it was strangling. Next came a tumbling out at the door of one black mass, which heaved and parted at intervals into two figures, which closed, which parted again, which at last fell down the steps together. Then appeared a figure in white. It was the unhappy Andalusian; and she, seeing the outline of Catalina's person, ran up to her, unable to utter one syllable. Pitying the agony of her horror, Catalina took her within her own cloak, and carried her out at the garden

gate. Calderon had by this time died; and the maniacal alcalde had risen up to pursue his wife. But Kate, foreseeing what he would do, had stepped silently within the shadow of the garden wall. Looking down the road to the town, and seeing nobody moving, the maniac, for some purpose, went back to the house. This moment Kate used to recover the *locanda*, with the lady still panting in horror. What was to be done? To think of concealment in this little place was out of the question. The alcalde was a man of local power, and it was certain that he would kill his wife on the spot. Kate's generosity would not allow her to have any collusion with this murderous purpose. At Cuzco, the principal convent was ruled by a near relative of the Andalusian; and there she would find shelter. Kate therefore saddled her horse rapidly, placed the lady behind, and rode off in the darkness.

About five miles out of the town their road was crossed by a torrent, over which they could not hit the bridge. "Forward!" cried the lady; "Oh, heavens! forward!" and Kate repeating the word to the horse, the docile creature leaped down into the water. They were all sinking at first; but having its head free, the horse swam clear of all obstacles through the midnight darkness, and scrambled out on the opposite bank. The two riders were dripping from the shoulders downward. But, seeing a light twinkling from a cottage window, Kate rode up; obtaining a little refreshment, and the benefit of a fire, from a poor labouring man. From this man she also bought a warm mantle for the lady, who, besides her torrent bath, was dressed in a light evening robe, so that but for the horseman's cloak of Kate she would have perished. But there was no time to lose. They had already lost two hours from the consequences of their cold bath. Cuzco was still eighteen miles distant; and the alcalde's shrewdness would at once divine this to be his wife's mark. They remounted: very soon the silent night echoed the hoofs of a pursuing rider; and now commenced the most frantic race, in which each party rode as if the whole game of life were staked upon the

issue. The pace was killing: and Kate has delivered it as her opinion, in the memoirs which she wrote, that the alcalde was the better mounted. This may be doubted. And certainly Kate had ridden too many years in the Spanish cavalry, to have any fear of his worship's horsemanship; but it was a prodigious disadvantage that *her* horse had to carry double; while the horse ridden by her opponent was one of those belonging to the murdered Don Antonio, and known to Kate as a powerful animal.

At length they had come within three miles of Cuzco. The road after this descended the whole way to the city, and in some places rapidly, so as to require a cool rider. Suddenly a deep trench appeared traversing the whole extent of a broad heath. It was useless to evade it. To have hesitated, was to be lost. Kate saw the necessity of clearing it; but she doubted much whether her poor exhausted horse, after twenty-one miles of work so severe, had strength for the effort. However, the race was nearly finished; a score of dreadful miles had been accomplished; and Kate's maxim, which never yet had failed, both figuratively for life, and literally for the saddle, was—to ride at everything that showed a front of resistance. She did so now. Having come upon the trench rather too suddenly, she wheeled round for the advantage of coming down upon it with more impetus, rode resolutely at it, cleared it, and gained the opposite bank. The hind feet of her horse were sinking back from the rottenness of the ground; but the strong supporting bridle-hand of Kate carried him forward; and in ten minutes more they would be in Cuzco.

This being seen by the vengeful alcalde, who had built great hopes on the trench, he unslung his carbine, pulled up, and fired after the bonny black horse and its two bonny riders. But this vicious manœuvre would have lost his worship any bet that he might have had depending on this admirable steeplechase. For the bullets, says Kate in her memoirs, whistled round the poor clinging lady *en croupe*—luckily none struck *her*; but one wounded the horse. And that settled the odds.

Kate now planted herself well in her stirrups to enter Cuzco, almost dangerously a winner; for the horse was so maddened by the wound, and the road so steep, that he went like blazes; and it really became difficult for Kate to guide him with any precision through narrow episcopal¹ paths.

Henceforwards the wounded horse required unintermitting attention; and yet, in the mere luxury of strife, it was impossible for Kate to avoid turning a little in her saddle to see the alcalde's performance on this tight-rope of the trench. His worship's horsemanship being, perhaps, rather rusty, and he not perfectly acquainted with his horse, it would have been agreeable for *him* to compromise the case by riding round, or dismounting. But all *that* was impossible. The job must be done. And I am happy to report, for the reader's satisfaction, the sequel—so far as Kate could attend the performance. Gathering himself up for mischief, the alcalde took a mighty sweep, as if ploughing out the line of some vast encampment, or tracing the *pomoerium* for some future Rome; then, like thunder and lightning, with arms flying aloft in the air, down he came upon the trembling trench. But the horse refused the leap; to take the leap was impossible; absolutely to refuse it, the horse felt, was immoral; and therefore, as the only compromise that *his* unlearned brain could suggest, he threw his worship right over his ears, lodging him safely in a sandheap, that rose with clouds of dust and screams of birds into the morning air. Kate had now no time to send back her compliments in a musical halloo. The alcalde missed breaking his neck on this occasion very narrowly; but his neck was no use to him in twenty minutes more, as the reader will find. Kate rode right onwards: and, coming in with a lady behind her, horse bloody, and pace such as no hounds could have lived with, she ought to have made a great sensation in Cuzco. But, unhappily, the people of Cuzco, the spectators that *should* have been, were fast asleep in bed.

¹ "*Episcopal*:"—The roads around Cuzco were made, and maintained, under the patronage and control of the bishop.

The steeplechase into Cuzco had been a fine headlong thing, considering the torrent, the trench, the wounded horse, the lovely Andalusian lady, with her agonising fears, mounted behind Kate, together with the meek dove-like dawn: but the finale crowded together the quickest succession of changes that out of a melodrama ever *can* have been witnessed. Kate reached the convent in safety; carried into the cloisters, and delivered like a parcel, the fair Andalusian. But to rouse the servants and obtain admission to the convent caused a long delay; and on returning to the street through the broad gateway of the convent, whom should she face but the alcalde! How he had escaped the trench, who can tell? He had no time to write memoirs; his horse was too illiterate. But he *had* escaped; temper not at all improved by that adventure, and now raised to a hell of malignity by seeing that he had lost his prey. The morning light showed him how to use his sword, and whom he had before him, and he attacked Kate with fury. Both were exhausted; and Kate, besides that she had no personal quarrel with the alcalde, having now accomplished her sole object in saving the lady, would have been glad of a truce. She could with difficulty wield her sword: and the alcalde had so far the advantage, that he wounded Kate severely. That roused her ancient Biscayan blood; and she turned on him now with deadly determination. At that moment in rode two servants of the alcalde, who took part with their master.

These odds strengthened Kate's resolution, but weakened her chances. Just then, however, rode in and ranged himself on Kate's side, the servant of the murdered Don Calderon. In an instant Kate had pushed her sword through the alcalde, who died upon the spot. In an instant the servant of Calderon had fled. In an instant the alguazils had come up. They and the servants of the alcalde pressed furiously on Kate, who was again fighting for her life with persons not even known to her by sight. Against such odds, she was rapidly losing ground; when, in an instant, on the opposite side of the street, the great gates of the Episcopal Palace

rolled open. Thither it was that Calderon's servant had fled. The bishop and his attendants hurried across. "Senor Caballero," said the bishop, "in the name of the Virgin, I enjoin you to surrender your sword."—"My lord," said Kate, "I dare not do it with so many enemies about me."—"But I," replied the bishop, "become answerable to the law for your safe keeping." Upon which, with filial reverence, all parties dropped their swords. Kate being severely wounded, the bishop led her into his palace. In another instant came the catastrophe: Kate's discovery could no longer be delayed; the blood flowed too rapidly; and the wound was in her bosom. She requested a private interview with the bishop; all was known in a moment; surgeons and attendants were summoned hastily; and Kate had fainted. The good bishop pitied her, and had her attended in his palace; then removed to a convent; then to a second convent at Lima; and, after many months had passed, his report of the whole extraordinary case in all its details to the supreme government at Madrid, drew from the king, Philip IV, and from the papal legate, an order that the nun should be transferred to Spain.

ANALECTA

LIFE.—What is life? Darkness and formless vacancy for a beginning, or something beyond all beginning; then next a dim lotos of human consciousness, finding itself afloat upon the bosom of waters without a shore; then a few sunny smiles and many tears; a little love and infinite strife; whisperings from paradise and fierce mockeries from the anarchy of chaos; dust and ashes, and once more darkness circling round, as if from the beginning, and in this way rounding or making an island of our fantastic existence; *that* is human life, *that* the inevitable amount of man's laughter and his tears—of what he suffers and he does—of his motions this way and that way, to the right or to the left, backwards or forwards—of all his seeming realities and all his absolute negations—his shadowy pomps and his pompous shadows—of whatsoever he thinks, finds, makes or mars, creates or animates, loves, hates, or in dread hope anticipates. So it is, so it has been, so it will be for ever and ever.

* * *

LOVE.—It is not usual for men to meet with their capital disappointments in early life, at least not in youth. For, as to disappointments in love, which are doubtless the most bitter and incapable of comfort, though otherwise likely to arise in youth, they are in this way made impossible at a very early age, that no man can be in love to the whole extent of his capacity until he is in full possession of all his faculties, and with the sense of dignified maturity. A perfect love, such as is necessary to the anguish of a perfect disappoint-

ment, presumes also for its object, not a mere girl, but woman, mature both in person and character, and womanly dignity.

* * *

WASTE.—It is always a pity to see anything lost and wasted, especially love.

* * *

LITERATURE AND INTELLECT.—Literature very imperfectly represents the intellectual interests of any people; and literary people are, in a large proportion, as little intellectual people as any one meets with.

* * *

THE GAIN AND LOSS OF OPIUM-EATING.—Opium gives and takes away. It defeats the steady habit of exertion; but it creates spasms of irregular exertion. It ruins the natural power of life; but it develops preternatural paroxysms of intermitting power.

* * *

THE ROMAN MIND.—The Roman mind was great in the presence of man, mean in the presence of nature; impotent to comprehend or to delineate the internal strife of *passion*, but powerful beyond any other national mind to display the energy of the *will* victorious over all passion.

* * *

GERMAN LITERARY STYLE.—Every German regards a sentence in the light of a package, and a package not for the mail-coach but for the waggon, into which his privilege is to crowd as much as he possibly can. Having framed a sentence, therefore, he next proceeds to *pack* it, which is effected partly by unwieldy tails and codicils, but chiefly by enormous parenthetical involutions. All qualifications, limitations, exceptions, illustrations, are stuffed and violently rammed into the bowels of the principal proposition. That all this equipage of accessories is not so arranged as to assist its own orderly

development, no more occurs to a German as any fault, than that in a package of shawls or of carpets the colours and patterns are not fully displayed.

* * *

ISOLATION.—True it is that we who see most of each other, nearest relations united in the same household, see but little of that inner world, that world of secret self-consciousness, in which each of us lives a second life apart, and with himself alone, collateral to his other life, or life which he lives in common with others. That is a world in which every man, the very meanest, is a solitary presence, and cannot admit the fellowship even of that one among his fellow creatures whom he loves the most and perhaps regards as his other self.

* * *

ANECDOTAGE.—*All* anecdotes, I fear, are false. I am sorry to say so, but my duty to the reader extorts from me the disagreeable confession, as upon a matter specially investigated by myself, that all dealers in anecdotes are tainted with mendacity. Rarer than the phoenix is that virtuous man (a monster he is—nay, he is an impossible man) who will consent to lose a prosperous story on the consideration that it happens to be a lie. All history, therefore, being built partly, and some of it altogether, on anecdotage, must be a tissue of falsehoods. . . . Date from *Anno Domini* or from the Julian era, patronize Olympiads or patronize (as *I* do from misanthropy because nobody else will) the era of Nabonassar—no matter. Upon every road, thicker than mile-stones, you see records of human mendacity, or (which is much worse in my opinion) of human sympathy with other people's mendacity.

* * *

SHAKESPEARE.—It was a most witty saying with respect to a piratical and knavish publisher who made a trade of insulting the memories of deceased authors by forged writings, that he was “among the new terrors

of death." But in the gravest sense it may be affirmed of Shakespeare that he is among the modern luxuries of life; that life in fact is a new thing, and one more to be coveted, since Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness, and pushed its dark frontiers into regions not so much as dimly descried or even suspected before his time, far less illuminated (as they now are) by beauty and tropical luxuriance.

* * *

SHELLEY.—When one thinks of the early misery which he suffered, and of the insolent infidelity which, being yet so young, he wooed with a lover's passion, then the darkness of midnight begins to form a deep impenetrable background, upon which the phantasmagoria of all that is to come may arrange itself in troubled phosphoric streams and sweeping processions of woe. Yet again, when one recurs to his gracious nature, his fearlessness, his truth, his purity from all fleshliness of appetite, his freedom from vanity, his diffusive love and tenderness—suddenly out of the darkness reveals itself a morning of May, forests and thickets of rose advance to the foreground, and from the midst of them looks out "the eternal child," cleansed from his sorrow, radiant with joy, having power given him to forget the misery which he suffered, power given him to forget the misery which he caused, and leaning with his heart upon that dove-like faith against which his erring intellect had rebelled.

* * *

GOLDSMITH.—My trust is that Goldsmith lived on the whole a life which, though troubled, was one of average enjoyment. Unquestionably, when reading at midnight, in the middle watch of a century which he never reached by one whole generation, this record of one so guileless, so upright, or seeming to be otherwise only in the eyes of those who did not know his difficulties, nor could have understood them; when recurring also to his admirable genius, to the sweet natural gaiety

of his oftentimes pathetic humour, and to the varied accomplishments from talent or erudition by which he gave effect to endowments so fascinating—one cannot but sorrow over the strife which he sustained and over the wrong which he suffered. A few natural tears fall from every eye at the rehearsal of so much contumely from fools, which he faced unresistingly, as one bare-headed in a hailstorm; and worse to bear than the scorn of fools was the imperfect sympathy and jealous self-distrusting esteem which to the last he received from his friends. Doubtless he suffered much wrong; but so, in one way or other, do most men; he suffered also this special wrong, that in his lifetime he never was fully appreciated by any one friend—something of a counter-movement ever mingled with praise for *him*; he never saw himself enthroned in the heart of any young and fervent admirer; and he was always overshadowed by men less deeply genial, though more showy, than himself; but these things happen, and will happen for ever to myriads amongst the benefactors of earth. Their names ascend in songs of thankful commemoration, yet seldom until the ears are deaf that would have thrilled to the music.

* * *

SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN.—The possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakespeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, of Imogen, of Hermione, of Perdita, of Ophelia, of Miranda, and many others. The Una of Spenser, earlier by ten or fifteen years than most of these, was an idealized portrait of female innocence and virgin purity, but too shadowy and unreal for a dramatic reality. And as to the Grecian classics, let not the reader imagine for an instant that any prototype in this field of Shakespearean power can be looked for there. The Antigone and the Electra of the tragic poets are the two leading female characters that classical antiquity offers to our respect, but assuredly not to our impassioned love, as disciplined and exalted in the

school of Shakespeare. They challenge our admiration, severe and even stern, as impersonations of filial duty, cleaving to the steps of a desolate and afflicted old man, or of sisterly affection, maintaining the rights of a brother, under circumstances of peril, of desertion, and consequently of perfect self-reliance. Iphigenia, again, though not dramatically coming before us in her own person but according to the beautiful report of a spectator, presents us with a fine statuesque model of heroic fortitude, and of one whose young heart, even in the very agonies of her cruel immolation, refused to forget, by a single indecorous gesture, or so much as a moment's neglect of her own princely descent, that she herself was "a lady in the land." These are fine marble groups, but they are not the warm breathing realities of Shakespeare; there is "no speculation" in their cold marble eyes; the breath of life is not in their nostrils; the fine pulses of womanly sensibilities are not throbbing in their bosoms. And besides this immeasurable difference between the cold moony reflexes of life as exhibited by the power of Grecian art and the true sunny life of Shakespeare, it must be observed that the Antigones, etc., of the antique put forward but one single trait of character, like the aloe with its single blossom. This solitary feature is presented to us as an abstraction, and as an insulated quality; whereas in Shakespeare all is presented in the *concrete*, that is to say not brought forward in relief, as by some effort of an anatomical artist, but embodied and embedded, so to speak, as by the force of a creative nature, in the complex system of a human life: a life in which all the elements move and play simultaneously, and, with something more than mere simultaneity or co-existence, acting and re-acting each upon the other—nay even acting by each other and through each other. In Shakespeare's characters is felt for ever a real *organic* life, where each is for the whole and in the whole, and where the whole is for each and in each. They only are real incarnations.

WRITING UNDER PRESSURE.—Not that always and unconditionally it is an evil to be hurried in writing for the press. I doubt not that many a score of practised writers for the press will have been self-observing enough to notice a phenomenon which I have many times noticed, viz., that hurry and severe compression from an instant summons that brooks no delay have often a tendency to furnish the flint and steel for eliciting sudden scintillations of originality; sometimes in what regards the picturesque felicity of the phrase, sometimes in what regards the thought itself or its illustrations. To *autoschediase* or improvise is sometimes in effect to be forced into a consciousness of creative energies that would else have slumbered through life. The same stimulation to the creative faculty occurs even more notoriously in musical improvisations; and all great executants on the organ have had reason to bemoan their inability to arrest these sudden felicities of impassioned combinations, and these flying arabesques of loveliest melody, which the magnetic inspiration of the moment has availed to excite.

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CHRISTIANITY AND KANT.—I can never think that man a Christian who has blotted out of his scheme the very powers by which only the great offices and functions of Christianity can be sustained; neither can I think that any man, though he make himself a marvellously clever disputant, ever could tower upwards into a very great philosopher unless he should begin or should end with Christianity. Kant is a dubious exception. Not that I mean to question his august pretensions, so far as they went, and in his proper line. Within his own circle, none durst tread but he. But that circle was limited. He was called, by one who weighed him well, the *alles-zermalmender*, the world-shattering Kant. He could destroy—his intellect was essentially destructive. He was the Gog and he was the Magog of Hunnish desolation to the existing schemes

of Philosophy. He probed them; he showed the vanity of vanities which besieged their foundations—the rottenness below, the hollowness above. But he had no instincts of creation or restoration within his Apollyon mind; for he had no love, no faith, no self-distrust, no humility, no child-like docility; all which qualities belonged essentially to Coleridge's mind and waited only for manhood and for sorrow to bring them forward. . . . But *exoriare aliquis*—and some philosopher I am persuaded *will* arise; and “one sling of some victorious arm” (*Paradise Lost*, bk. x) will yet destroy the destroyer, in so far as he has applied himself to the destruction of Christian hope. For my faith is that though a great man, may by a rare possibility be an infidel, an intellect of the highest order must build upon Christianity.

* * *

WAR.—A great truth it was which Wordsworth uttered, whatever might be the expansion which he allowed to it, when he said that

God's most perfect instrument,
Is working out a pure intent,
Is man—array'd for mutual slaughter:
Yea, Carnage is God's daughter.

There is a mystery in approaching this aspect of the case, which no man has read fully. War has a deeper and more ineffable relation to hidden grandeurs in man, than has yet been deciphered. To execute judgments of retribution upon outrages offered to human rights or to human dignity, to vindicate the sanctities of the altar and the sanctities of the hearth—these are functions of human greatness which war has many times assumed, and many times faithfully discharged. But, behind all these, there towers dimly a greater. The great phenomenon of war it is, this and this only, which keeps open in man a spiracle—an organ of respiration—for

breathing a transcendent atmosphere, and dealing with an idea that else would perish—viz., the idea of mixed crusade and martyrdom, doing and suffering, that finds its realization in a battle such as that of Waterloo—viz., a battle fought for interests of the human *race*, felt even where they are not understood; so that the tutelary angel of man, when he traverses such a dreadful field, when he reads the distorted features, counts the ghastly ruins, sums the hidden anguish, and the harvests

Of horror breathing from the silent ground,

nevertheless, speaking as God's messenger, "blesses it, and calls it very good."

* * *

THE CURSE OF REMEMBRANCE.—Martyrdom it is, and no less, to revivify by effect of your own, or passively to see revivified, in defiance of your own fierce resistance, the gorgeous spectacles of your visionary morning life, or of your too rapturous noontide, relieved upon a background of funeral darkness. Such poisonous transfigurations, by which the paradise of youthful hours is forced into distilling demoniac misery for ruined nerves, exist for many a profound sensibility. And, as regards myself, touch but some particular key of laughter and of echoing music, sound but for a moment one bar of preparation, and immediately the pomps and glory of all that has composed for me the delirious vision of life re-awaken for torment; the orchestras of the earth open simultaneously to my inner ear; and in a moment I behold, forming themselves into solemn groups and processions, and passing over sad phantom stages, all that chiefly I have loved, or in whose behalf chiefly I have abhorred and cursed the grave—all that should *not* have died, yet died the soonest—the brilliant, the noble, the wise, the innocent, the brave, the beautiful. With these dreadful masks, and under the persecution of their malicious beauty, wakens up the worm that gnaws at the heart. Under that corrosion arises a

hatred, blind and vague, and incomprehensible even to one's self, as of some unknown snake-like enemy, in some unknown hostile world, brooding with secret power over the fountains of one's own vitality. Such scourges, at any rate, must be borne where the machinery of the nerves brings round the hour of torment.

* * *

GENIUS.—With respect to the question of the comparative happiness enjoyed by men of genius, it is not necessary to argue, nor does it seem possible to prove, even in the case of any one individual poet, that, on the whole, he was either more happy or less happy than the average mass of his fellow-men: far less could this be argued as to the whole class of poets. What seems *really* open to proof is, that men of genius have a larger *capacity* of happiness, which capacity, both from within and from without, may be defeated in ten thousand ways. This seems involved in the very word *genius*. For, after all the pretended and hollow attempts to distinguish genius from talent, I shall continue to think (what heretofore I have advanced) that no distinction in the case is tenable for a moment but this—viz., that genius is that mode of intellectual power which moves in alliance with the *genial* nature: *i.e.*, with the capacities of pleasure and pain; whereas talent has no vestige of such an alliance, and is perfectly independent of all human sensibilities. Consequently, genius is a voice or breathing that represents the *total* nature of man, and, therefore, his enjoying and suffering nature, as well as his knowing and distinguishing nature; whilst, on the contrary, talent represents only a single function of that nature. Genius is the language which interprets the synthesis of the human spirit with the human intellect, each acting through the other; whilst talent speaks only from the insulated intellect. And hence also it is that, besides its relation to suffering and enjoyment, genius always implies a deeper relation to virtue and vice; whereas talent has no shadow of a relation to *moral* qualities any more than it has to vital sensibilities. A man of the highest talent is often

obtuse and below the ordinary standard of men in his feelings; but no man of genius can unyoke himself from the society of moral perceptions that are brighter, and sensibilities that are more tremulous, than those of men in general.

